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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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BENGALURU'S FORECAST

Yesterday
Min temp: 22°C
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Today
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Max temp: 29°C

LS polls: Campaigning ends for 5th phase for 49 seats

Amethi, Rae Bareli, Baramullah are in the limelight

MUMBAI/LUCKNOW, 18 MAY

Campaigning concluded on Saturday for the fifth phase of Lok Sabha polls covering 49 constituencies in six states and two UTs including the high-profile Rae Bareli and Amethi seats from where former Congress president Rahul Gandhi and Union Minister Smriti Irani are in the fray respectively.

On Monday, polling will be held in 13 seats in Maharashtra, 14 in Uttar Pradesh, seven in West Bengal, five in Bihar, three in Jharkhand, five in Odisha and one each in J-K and Ladakh. This round covers the least number of seats (49) in the seven-phase election.

In Jammu and Kashmir's Baramulla, former chief minister Omar Abdullah, who is among 22 candidates in the fray.

With over 40 of these seats with the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), Prime Minister Narendra and other BJP leaders tried to fend off the challenge posed by the INDIA bloc parties by raising the pitch on issues of appeasement, dynastic politics, Ram temple, Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), corruption and welfare initiatives taken by his government.

Congress and INDIA parties accused BJP of polarising voters **PHOTO: PTI**

Congress and other INDIA bloc parties accused BJP of polarising voters with its "Hindu-Muslim politics", and not focusing on issues like unemployment and inflation. They also persisted with their offensive on the issues of reservations and protecting the Constitution.

The parties also wrapped up canvassing in 35 Assembly constituencies in Odisha, where BJD president and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik is among the candidates. Rahul, who has contested from Wayanad in Kerala, is also in the fight for Rae Bareli, a Nehru-Gandhi family pocket borough that was represented by his mother Sonia Gandhi since 2004. In Amethi, Union minister Smriti Irani is seeking a second term.

From Lucknow, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh is eyeing a fourth term. He is up against sitting SP MLA Ravidas Mehrotra.

During a rally in Lucknow, Singh said, "These elections are also to see who has raised the country's stature in the world." In the Faizabad Lok Sabha seat, which covers the temple town of Ayodhya, the electoral contest is mainly between sitting BJP MP Lallu Singh, who is seeking a hat-trick, and Awadhesh Prasad, the SP MLA from Milkipur (SC) assembly constituency in Ayodhya. Security has been stepped up in West Bengal's seven constituencies, with over 57 per cent of the polling stations identified as sensitive in the fifth phase, the highest till now in this election.

In Bihar, former union minister Rajiv Pratap Rudy's (Saran) bid to score a hat-trick has been challenged by RJD president Lalu Prasad's daughter Rohini Acharya, who had donated her kidney to her father. RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav, who has suffered a back injury, campaigned for his elder sister in Saran. The curtains also came down on Saturday over campaigning for three Lok Sabha seats and Gandey Assembly by-poll in Jharkhand. *—PTI*

'PLEA INFRUCTUOUS'

Bibhav Kumar arrested in Swati Maliwal assault case

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

The anticipatory bail plea of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's aide Bibhav Kumar, accused of assaulting AAP Rajya Sabha member Swati Maliwal, has become infructuous as he has been arrested, a Delhi court observed on Saturday.

Kumar was arrested on Saturday, two days after an FIR was registered against him at the Civil Lines police station.

Additional Sessions Judge Sushil Anuj Tyagi, while dictating the order to the court staff on the anticipatory bail plea, noted that Additional Public Prosecutor Atul Kumar Srivastava appeared through videoconferencing around 4.45 pm and informed the court that Kumar has already been arrested in the case.

"On court query, the additional public prosecutor for the state submitted that the applicant was arrested at

Bibhav Kumar **PHOTO: X/@RATIONALPRABAL**

vabout 4.15 pm," the judge said. The judge noted Srivastava's submissions that Kumar's wife had been duly informed about his arrest.

"Since, the applicant (Kumar) has already been arrested, the present application is disposed of being infructuous," the court said.

"Copy of this order be also sent to the investigating officer or station house officer concerned for information and necessary action," it said.

Earlier in the day, the court had reserved its order on the plea filed before it on Saturday. *—PTI*

Article 370 buried in 'Khabristan': PM

SONIPAT, 18 MAY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi Saturday kept up the attack on the Congress, saying it should forget the "dream" of bringing back Article 370 as it has been "buried" in the "khabristan (graveyard)".

Addressing a rally at Gohana here, his second of the day in Haryana, Modi referred to the Lok Sabha polls as a "kurukshetra (battle)" in which "there is development on one hand and 'vote jihad' on the other". Striking a chord with the locals, Modi referred to Gohana's famous "Matu Ram ki jalebi" to target the opposition. Attacking the INDIA bloc, he said they have a formula of having five prime ministers in five years if they come to power. "Ask them is the prime minister's post our Matu Ram ki jalebi".

Prime Minister Narendra Modi being felicitated by Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Saini in Sonipat district on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

"In the 2024 'kurukshetra', there is development on one hand and 'vote jihad' on the other," he said. He waited for people to respond before saying, "Your reply has decided 'Phir Ek Baar'," and the crowd went, "Modi Sarkar".

Modi said now the Congress is not even hiding its "desh-virodhi agenda (anti-national agenda). They are saying openly what Modi did in 10 years they will reverse it if they come to power, he said.

But their "dream" of bringing Article 370 back will never be fulfilled, he added. *—PTI*

India, UK review implementation of 10-yr roadmap

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

A comprehensive review of India-UK 'Roadmap 2030' was undertaken during Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra's two-day visit to London, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Saturday. The two sides also agreed to further strengthen bilateral cooperation in areas of trade, defence and security, science and technology and people-to-people exchanges. The foreign secretary visited the UK from 16 to 17 May to attend the 16th round of Foreign Office Consultations. In 2021, India and the UK adopted a 10-year roadmap to expand ties. *—PTI*

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'Maliwal blackmailed by BJP to be part of a plot'

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

AAP leader Atishi on Saturday claimed party MP Swati Maliwal, who has accused Arvind Kejriwal's aide Bibhav Kumar of assaulting her, is facing charges in an illegal recruitment case and she was "blackmailed" by BJP to become part of the "conspiracy" against the Chief Minister.

It has been 24 hours since Kumar filed a complaint against Maliwal and police are yet to register an FIR. The Delhi Police is a "tool of BJP" and is targeting Kejriwal before the Lok Sabha elections in the national capital, charged Atishi, also a Cabinet Minister in the city government.

In turn, Delhi BJP accused AAP leaders of circulating "edited" videos to tarnish Maliwal's image.

Atishi alleged that Maliwal went to the Chief Minister's residence on Monday without an appointment. Atishi said Maliwal was made the face of this "conspiracy" by BJP. "BJP has a pattern. First they file cases and then they threaten to send leaders to jail. Swati Maliwal is facing charges in an illegal recruitment case registered by the Anti-Corruption Branch. An FIR has been registered in the case and it is at a stage where she could be arrested, the AAP leader charged. *—PTI*

- The Delhi Police is a "tool of BJP" and is targeting Kejriwal before the Lok Sabha elections in the national capital, charged Atishi, also a Cabinet Minister in the city government

EC finalises 22 candidates for SE Teachers' seat

BENGALURU, 18 MAY

Karnataka Election Commission has finalised 22 candidates, including one woman, for Karnataka South-East Teachers' constituency for the 3 June MLCs election. The last day to file the nominations was on Thursday. JD(S) has fielded its MLC SL Bhoje Gowda and Congress has fielded KK Manjunath. A total of 103 candidates, including three women, had filed their nominations from three graduates' and three teachers' constituencies in the State. BJP has filed nominations for five seats, and JD(S) for one seat. Amarnath Patel will be the face of BJP for north east graduate's constituency, Dr Dhananjay Sarjee for south west graduate's constituency, A Deve Gowda for Bengaluru graduate's constituency, YA Narayana Swamy for south east teacher's constituency and EC Ningaraju for south teacher's constituency, L Bhoje Gowda for South-West Teachers. *—Salar News*

4 B'deshis, 1 Indian tout arrested in Tripura

AGARTALA, 18 MAY

Four Bangladesh nationals and one Indian citizen were arrested when they were about to board a Chennai-bound express train from Agartala station, a railway police officer said on Saturday. They could not show any valid documents-either passport or visa to travel in India, during preliminary interrogation, he said."A group of few people were entering the platform through the main gate of the station to catch a Chennai bound express train on Friday around 5pm. On suspicion, the GRP personnel detained five people and took them to a police station for interrogation," the Officer in Charge (OC), GRP Agartala station, Tapas Das, said. The arrested Bangladesh citizens were identified as Jahangir Alam,21, Riyad Hussain,22, Onan Hussain,19, and Imam Hussain,23. *—PTI*

9 killed as bus catches fire in Haryana

GURUGRAM, 18 MAY

Nine people, including five women and a 12-year-old girl, were burnt alive and 17 injured when a moving tourist bus caught fire near Dhulawat village in Haryana's Nuh district in the early hours of Saturday.

The incident took place around 2am on the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal (KMP) Expressway. The bus was carrying around 60 people, all residents of Punjab's Hoshiarpur and Ludhiana, who were returning from pilgrim towns of Mathura and Vrindavan. All of them are relatives. The cause of the fire is said to be a short circuit in the AC box of the bus but it is yet to be ascertained, they said. The police said an FIR has been registered against the bus driver, who fled the scene after the incident, at Sadar Tauru police station. *—PTI*

Kejriwal's dare after aide's arrest; says will go to BJP office

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Saturday that he and other AAP leaders would go to the BJP headquarters on Sunday "so that the Prime Minister can send anyone he wants to jail".

The BJP is saying they will send AAP MP Raghav Chadha and Delhi ministers Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj to jail too, he claimed at a press briefing hours after his aide

Arvind Kejriwal **PHOTO: PTI**

Bibhav Kumar was arrested in connection with the alleged assault on his party's parliamentarian Swati Maliwal.

Kejriwal, who is also the AAP national convener, however, asserted that his party could not be crushed by sending its leaders to jail.

Accusing Modi of "playing the game" of sending AAP leaders such as Manish Sisodia, Satyendar Jain, and Sanjay Singh to jail, he said, "I along with my MLAs and MPs would go to the BJP office at noon tomorrow so that the prime minister can send anyone he wants to jail." He claimed that the AAP's "fault" was that its government in Delhi built good schools, set up Mohalla Clinics, provided free treatment and ensured free round-the-clock power supply in the city which the BJP could not do. Kejriwal, who was arrested in a money laundering case linked to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam, has been granted interim bail till 1June by the Supreme Court to campaign in the Lok Sabha polls. *—PTI*

RED ALERT FOR 36 VILLAGES

Tiger kills man in MP, feasts on his body

BHOPAL, 18 MAY

Forest authorities have sounded a red alert for 36 villages in Madhya Pradesh's Raisen district as a tiger is on the prowl after killing a 62-year-old man in the region close to the capital Bhopal, an official said on Saturday.

The half-eaten body of the victim, Maniram Jatav, a resident of Neemkheda village, was found on Wednesday in the east range of the Raisen forest division, about 35 km from Bhopal district headquarters, the official said.

The attack has caused panic among villages as such killings are unheard of in the forested areas around Bhopal.

"We are monitoring the movements of the big cat. A red alert was sounded on Friday for 36 villages spread over 150 sq km. People have been asked not to venture into the forests till the animal is captured and the forest department intimates them," Raisen divisional forest officer (DFO) Vijay Kumar told PTI.

The attack has caused panic among the villagers **PHOTO: BCCL**

At least 100 people, including forest officials and volunteers from the NGOs, Wildlife Conservation Trust and Tinsa Foundation, are monitoring the tiger's locations, he said.

There are 100 cameras installed in the area. Teams on foot and in vehicles and people in a control room are analysing the footage to figure out the tiger's next move, the DFO said. Following the attack, residents of Neemkheda village are not stepping out of their houses alone or without a stick. The victim had ventured into the forest to pluck tendu leaves used in beedis, he added. Speaking on behalf of his wife, Pooja Jatav, who is the sarpanch of Neemkheda village, Purshottam Jatav said people in the area were not venturing out at night.

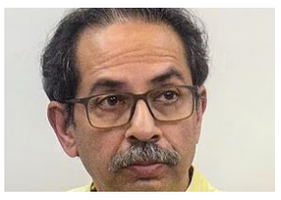
According to forest officials, the killer tiger might have ventured out of Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary in the Obaidullahganj forest division of Raisen. *—PTI*

- Teams on foot and in vehicles and people in a control room are analysing the footage to figure out the tiger's next move, the DFO said.

BJP planning to ban RSS: Uddhav Thackeray

MUMBAI, 18 MAY

Shiv Sena (UBT) Chief Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday claimed that BJP was planning to ban its ideological parent, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), after winning a third term in power. Speaking at his last rally here before the campaigning for the Lok Sabha elections ended in Maharashtra, Thackeray also said that the Election Commissioner who was "acting like Modi's servant" will be removed after INDIA government comes to power. "The way they tried to use and throw the Shiv Sena, a similar game will be played by Narendra Modi in future, and that has been stated by



Uddhav Thackeray **PHOTO: PTI**

JP Nadda," he said.

Thackeray was referring to Nadda's comments to a newspaper that when BJP was a small party and less capable, it needed RSS, but now the saffron party has grown, become more capable, and "runs itself".

"Nadda said there was a need of the RSS until now, (but) we are capable now and we don't need the RSS," Thackeray claimed. *—PTI*

Police reinstate Chennamma Pade women squad

HUBBALLI, 18 MAY

In view of the spate of murders of young women in Hubballi-Dharwad, Police Commissionerate has reinstated 'Rani Chennamma Pade', a dedicated force aimed at curbing illegal activities and violence against women. Comprising women police personnel, the force will not only provide security but also foster empowerment and awareness among the community. The squad will patrol the city, focusing on areas with high incidents of crimes. They will engage in outreach programmes to educate the public. *—Salar News*

Edu dept officer held for accepting Rs 50,000 bribe

KALABURAGI, 18 MAY

An education department employee was allegedly caught red-handed while accepting a bribe of Rs 50,000 for settlement of a retired teacher's pension, officials said, on Saturday. The action comes following a trap laid by Lokayukta police officials on the office of Block Education Officer Hanumanth Rathod in Aland in this district. During the raid, the officials caught Radhakrishna, the education department employee who allegedly acted as a "middleman" and was receiving money from Yashwantraoi Jamadar, the husband of the teacher and complainant. The middleman has been arrested in connection with the case. Block Education Officer has escaped after knowing about the incident, officials said, adding that a further investigation is underway. *—PTI*

BBMP files case against 3 for illegal tree felling in City

BENGALURU, 18 MAY

Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) forest unit has filed cases against two property owners and one resident for illegal tree felling in the City. The public notice issued by the Deputy Conservator of Forests (DCF) has detailed two separate incidents. In Sai Serenity layout of KR Puram Division's Mahadevpura Zone, a rain tree and four other trees were found to be cut down on two separate private properties. The case has been registered under the Karnataka Tree Preservation Act, 1976 (KPT Act) against Rajesh K Naidu and Annita Constructions, the likely property owners. In a separate incident, Ashwat Ram, a resident of Kumarakrupa in West Bengaluru, is accused of felling two roadside trees and using chemicals to deliberately dry them. Tree felling in Bengaluru is a serious offense, and KPT Act mandates permission from Forest Department for any tree removal. In a similar incident the forest department of BBMP had registered a case against GR Tech Park and Salarpuria Properties Pvt Ltd in Whitefield for illegally felling of 19 Ashoka trees on ITPL Main Road without any authorisation. *—Salar News*

6 injured as KSRTC bus rams into divider

BENGALURU, 18 MAY

Six people including the driver were injured after a KSRTC bus heading towards Bengaluru from Nelamangala lost control and rammed into a divider near Adakamaranahalli on Saturday. The bus coming from Somwarpet carried 35 passengers and no casualties were reported in the accident. The impact caused the rear axle to break and the front tyres to come off the vehicle. The heavily damaged bus came to a rest on top of the divider on the other side of the highway. The injured were taken to a nearby private hospital. A crane was called to remove the bus from the divider, but it was too damaged to be towed. The highway was partially blocked while the scene was cleared. A case was registered at Nelamangala Traffic Police Station. On 10 May a KSRTC bus toppled to one side on Kanakapura Road, injuring four passengers on board. *—Salar News*

Action against Prajwal if he is found guilty: Deve Gowda

Cases against my son Revanna were 'created': JD(S) Supremo

BENGALURU, 18 MAY

HD Deve Gowda *PHOTO: PTI*

- Deve Gowda had recently announced his decision not to celebrate his birthday and had requested his well-wishers and party workers to wish him from wherever they are. "I don't want to comment on things that are going on in the court regarding Revanna," Gowda said`

Breaking his silence over the sexual abuse charges levelled against JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna, party supremo HD Deve Gowda on Saturday said he has no objection to the action taken against his grandson if he is found guilty. He also said the cases against his son and JD(S) MLA HD Revanna, who is facing charges of sexual harassment and kidnap of a woman, were "created", but refrained from commenting further, as the matter was subjudice.

Addressing reporters, Gowda, who turned 92 today, said, "... I don't want to comment on things that are going on in the court regarding Revanna. Prajwal Revanna has gone abroad, regarding that, Kumaraswamy (Gowda's other son and state JD(S) chief) has on behalf of our family said it is the duty of the government to take action in accordance with the law of the land."

"There are several people connected to this (sexual abuse cases), I don't want to take anyone's names. Kumaraswamy has said that those who are involved in this matter, action should be taken against all of them, and the affected women should get justice and compensation."

Deve Gowda had recently announced his decision not to celebrate his birthday and had requested his well-wishers and party workers to wish him from wherever they are.

Prajwal is facing charges of multiple instances of sexually abusing women. The scandal has raised a political storm with the ruling Congress and BJP-JD(S) engaged in a slugfest.

He reportedly left for Germany on 27 April and is still at large. An Interpol Blue Corner Notice has been issued against him, in an effort to bring him back.

Responding to a query on BJP leader and advocate G Devaraje Gowda's allegations that Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar is behind the circulation of pen drive containing explicit videos involving Prajwal, Gowda said Kumaraswamy will respond to all of this.

"We have seen in the media as to what Devaraje Gowda has said. Kumaraswamy has been reacting to all this actively as the party's state President, he will speak, I won't at this point. I had campaigned for Lok Sabha polls, on June 4 after Lok Sabha polls results are announced, I will meet you (media)," he added.

Deve Gowda also requested media persons camping near his house to leave. "I also appeal to your owners."

—PTI

DKS, ministers rubbish BJP's claims on video

BENGALURU, 18 MAY

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and other State ministers on Saturday rubbished allegations about their role in the circulation of pen drives containing explicit videos involving Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna.

BJP leader and advocate G Devaraje Gowda, who is in custody after being arrested in a sexual abuse case and is also facing charges of video leak, on Friday alleged that Shivakumar and four other ministers are behind the circulation of the pen drives and was being fixed in false cases as he did not agree to be part of their plan.

He has even alleged that he was offered Rs 100 crore by Shivakumar to "bring a bad name" to the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and to tarnish the image of JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy in Prajwal Revanna's obscene video case.

Speaking to reporters here, Shivakumar said, "Better, let him (Gowda) file a case before Lokayukta or any other agency. I think he has some problems mentally. I'm very sorry, the national and state media shouldn't have picked up such baseless allegations. A person who is in jail, how can he make such allegations? All these are baseless. I don't want to comment."

Asked if he will be filing any defamation case against Gowda, he said, "I don't want to make any comment or speak on a person who is mentally sick. I appeal to his party people to get him a good treatment."

Shivakumar also asserted that his government's commitment to get justice for women victims of the sexual abuse case, and expressed confidence about the Special Investigation Team's (SIT) ongoing probe.

Minister Priyank Kharge said Gowda has alleged that three responsible ministers in the state government were part of a team and that there was a conspiracy. "We will discuss whatever legal course, we will take it." *—PTI*

Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna *PHOTO: PTI*

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar *PHOTO: PTI*

Shakti scheme didn't cause loss to metro: DKS on PM's views

BENGALURU, 18 MAY

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Saturday said that he is "shocked" by the reported statement of Prime Minister Narendra Modi that the "Shakthi scheme had resulted in loss of revenue for the Bengaluru metro".

Under the 'Shakti' scheme implemented by the Siddaramaiah-led Congress government, women can avail free travel in state-run buses.

Hitting out at Modi, he said that Modi lacks information on the Shakthi scheme and hence he has said that it has impacted revenues of the Bengaluru metro.

"Namma metro has earned a revenue of Rs 130 crore in the last one year. Footfalls too have gone up by 30 per cent for the same period. Bengaluru metro is limited to Bengaluru, while the Shakthi scheme is rolled out, keeping in mind people from across the state," he told reporters here.

The Shakthi scheme is rolled out by the Congress to ease the burden of price rise and inflation on women, Shivakumar said.

"Metro is a joint initiative between the State and the Centre and it has done well over the last one year. Someone seems to have provided incorrect information to the Prime Minister," he added.

"I would like to convey to Modi that the Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) and Bengaluru metro are being run efficiently while offering the Shakthi scheme to women. Women are taking 60 lakh trips per day in Karnataka. They are very happy with the Shakthi scheme. Many other states are expressing interest in Shakthi scheme," he said.

Modi has reportedly spoken in an interview on bus and the Metro rail services and whether or not he made a specific reference to Karnataka is not known.

When asked if there was a shortage of buses in North Karnataka, Shivakumar said, "We have already taken a decision to buy 1,000 new buses. Of these, 100 buses have been allocated to Ramanagara district. Buses will be allocated to North Karnataka as well.

"We are not looking at making profits from KSRTC. We are only ensuring it doesn't make losses. The government is reimbursing the cost of tickets under the Shakthi scheme," he said.

—PTI

'WAKE UP GOVT'

Vijayendra raises concern about women's safety in State

BENGALURU, 18 MAY

BY Vijayendra *PHOTO: PTI*

Karnataka BJP President BY Vijayendra on Saturday targeted Congress government in the State alleging the collapse of the law and order situation and raised concerns about the safety of women, while urging Siddaramaiah-led administration to "wake up" and take immediate measures in this regard.

He also reiterated the party's demand that the State government hand over the probe relating to cases of sexual abuse of women against Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna to CBI.

Protests were held by Mahila Morcha (women's wing) of BJP across the State and memorandums were submitted to Deputy Commissioners in all districts. In Bengaluru, a delegation led by senior BJP leader and former Chief Minister DV Sadananda Gowda submitted a memorandum to Director General of Police (DGP) Alok Mohan.

BJP is not supporting anyone in connection with these cases and only wants justice for women victims, Vijayendra said, adding that "Instead of using the cases politically, government should immediately hand over them to CBI aimed at providing justice for women victims...there is no question of any party here, it (alleged sexual abuse) was a heinous crime, whoever is guilty, however big they are, they should be punished."

Vijayendra was responding to party leader and advocate G Devaraje Gowda, who is in custody after being arrested in a sexual abuse case and is also facing charges of video leak, on Friday alleged that Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and four other ministers are behind the circulation of pen drives containing explicit videos involving Prajwal Revanna, and that he was being fixed in false cases as he did not agree to be part of their plan. *—PTI*

Train on new criminal laws: Police stations told

BENGALURU, 18 MAY

Bengaluru City Commissioner has asked police stations under it to prepare themselves for the new criminal laws which will be in force from 1 July. Indian Penal Code (IPC), Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) and Evidence Act will be replaced with Indian Code of Justice, Indian Civil Safety Code and Indian Evidence Code.

The Commissioner said under the new laws, police officers will be required to register an FIR whenever an individual lodges a complaint at a police station. Police officers should fully understand the specific acts under which cases should be registered to ensure that the public is not inconvenienced, Dayananda said in the notice to the stations. He advised ACP-level officers to ensure that the department maintains its credibility in court.

The key changes in the three bills are on dealing with offences of terrorism and acts against the state, registration of electronic first information reports (FIR), separate definitions on crimes such as lynching, detailed provisions and enhanced punishment for crimes against women and children. As per the new laws, the generation and supply of records will be in electronic form, including zero-FIR, e-FIR, and charge sheets, and victims will be provided information in digital form.

These new laws were passed at Parliament in December 2023 by the Central government which was aimed at modernising the legal framework to better address contemporary issues, ensuring speedy justice, and enhancing transparency and accountability in the legal process.

—Salar News

PHOTO: PTI

36 people booked for crop insurance fraud in Raichur

RAICHUR, 18 MAY

As many as 36 officials of Agriculture Department and middlemen have been booked for allegedly misappropriating crop insurance compensation funds meant for farmers at Jalahalli and Gandal villages at Devadurga taluk in Raichur district.

Farmers in Jalahalli and Gandal villages insured their paddy crops for 2021-22 and 273 applications were submitted. A compensation of Rs 1.4 crore was to be given to 106 farmers.

A probe by the department revealed that fraud happened during application at Common Service Centres. While submitting the application at CSCs, it is mandatory to verify if farmer's name matches land records. Bypassing verification, the accused submitted applications under the names of legitimate farmers and redirected the compensation funds to their accounts. *—Salar News*

FLYER DETAINED FOR FAKE BOMB THREAT

BENGALURU, 18 MAY

A passenger on an Air India Express flight from Bengaluru to Pune was detained on Thursday for creating panic by making a false bomb threat.

The incident occurred around 9pm, in front of counter number nine in Terminal 2 at Kempegowda International Airport (KIA). Rajesh Kumar Beniwal, who is a resident of Hisar in Haryana, was scheduled to fly by flight 15 821. He claimed that he had a bomb in his check-in bag during security check-in. Later the threat was determined to be a hoax.

—Salar News

MEDICAL COLLEGE GRAPPLES WITH WATER CRISIS

GADAG, 18 MAY

Gadag Institute of Medical Sciences has been grappling with severe water shortage with most of the medical students staying in college hostels going back home due to the crisis. None of the taps in the hostels had running water and students staying back at the institution were struggling to meet basic needs over the last week.

The students are supplied with impure water as the drinking water unit was broken and had not been repaired by administration.The drying up of Tungabhadra River has disrupted the water supply to the institute, affecting not only students but also doctors staying in quarters. GIMS Director Dr Basavaraj Bommanahalli said there is no water problem. *—Salar News*

SUICIDES ON CAMPUS

PES students protest as 4 end life in 9 months

BENGALURU, 18 MAY

PES University students and parents, and others protest against student suicides, at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Saturday. *PHOTO: SALAR*

Around 100 students of the Electronics City campus of PES University protested at Freedom Park here on Saturday demanding justice over the deaths of their four collegemates in nine months.

On Thursday, a 21-year-old student jumped to death from the fourth floor as he was denied entry to his semester exam.

Requesting anonymity, a student protester from the university told **Salar News**, "I have witnessed the college authority giving the extra money to the helpers at the college to hush up the case. I overheard the conversation of the helpers saying, 'A guy jumped from the fourth floor and nobody is there to clean the mess.' This shows how the college treated the lives of students."

Dushyant Dubey, an activist popularly known as St Brospeh who led the protest at Freedom Park, said, "Karnataka Educational Act, 1983, lacks provisions to address students' mental health issues and manhandling by educational institutions. We intend to push for an amendment and will request our Higher Education Minister to take action. We aim to criminalise the harassment of students by educational authorities."

The protesters demanded that Higher Education Minister MC Sudhakar take action against the institute. When Salar News reached out to Sudhakar, he was not available for comment.

Four students of the Electronics City campus of PES University committed suicide in last 9 months, all of them allegedly due to manhandling by exam invigilators.

On 14 March, a BTech student jumped to death as he was allegedly not allowed to take an examination for arriving late. A 19-year-old BBA student died after jumping from the 6th floor on 31 January. In July 2023, a 19-year-old student jumped to death from campus building.

PES University said, "The university is not responsible for the students' death and the university is cooperating with the investigating authorities by providing all access, information, and videos to all the students who died at our campus." *—Salar News*

Teenager kills brother for using his mobile phone to play games, arrested

BENGALURU, 18 MAY

An 18-year-old boy was arrested for allegedly killing his 15-year-old brother for constantly using his mobile phone to play games at Neriga village near Anekal town on the outskirts of Bengaluru on Saturday.

Pranesh, a seventh-grade student, was found dead 100 metres away from his house. According to Sarjapur police, Shivakumar initially misled his parents by claiming that he had discovered Pranesh's body and suggested that someone else had committed the murder.

During interrogation, police found CCTV footage showing Shivakumar carrying a hammer. Shivakumar was taken into custody and he confessed to hammering Pranesh on the head and abdomen on Wednesday as he was frustrated with his brother constantly using his mobile phone to play games.

Shivakumar admitted to assaulting Pranesh with a hammer, striking him on the head and abdomen. The family is from Andhra Pradesh and had moved to Karnataka three months ago for work, leaving Pranesh with his grandmother. Pranesh had joined his family for the summer holidays and Shivakumar, a school dropout, had accompanied his parents to work in the new location.

If anyone is struggling with mobile addiction, they can reach out to the Nimhans Centre for Well-Being at BTM Layout, 1st Stage, or call their helpline at 9480829675.

—Salar News

PHOTO: X/ @SUVENDU ADHIKARI

Sandeshkhali BJP worker Piyali Das released from jail

KOLKATA, 18 MAY

A BJP worker of Sandeshkhali, Piyali Das, was released from a correctional home on Saturday, a day after the Calcutta High Court granted her bail in a criminal case and ordered her immediate release on personal bond. A case was filed against Das alleging that she got the signature of a woman of Sandeshkhali on a blank paper which was later filled up as complaints of sexual assault against TMC leaders. After Das came out of Dum Dum Central Correctional Home near on Saturday evening, BJP supporters greeted her with garlands and flower bouquets. "I will remain with the truth and continue to fight this conspiracy. It is now proven in the court that my arrest was illegal. Allegations of sexual abuse and land grab were levelled against TMC leaders. *—PTI*

EC to deploy central forces for polls in Odisha

BHUBANESWAR, 18 MAY

The Election Commission of India will deploy 102 companies of central armed police forces (CAPFs) for the second phase of simultaneous Lok Sabha and assembly polls in Odisha on May 20, an official said on Saturday. Voting will be held in Aska, Bargarh, Bolangir, Kandhamal and Sundargarh Lok Sabha seats and 35 assembly constituencies falling under these parliamentary seats on Monday. State Chief Electoral Officer Nikunja Bihari Dhal said that the highest of 22 companies of central forces would be deployed in Maoist-affected Kandhamal district, followed by Ganjam (20), Sundargarh (16), 14 each in Bargarh and Bolangir, five each in Jharsuguda and Boudh, four in Sonepur and two in Nayagarh. *—PTI*

BJP MP and AAP MLA get into verbal spat in Guj

NARMADA, 18 MAY

A sitting BJP MP and AAP MLA, both contestants of the Lok Sabha elections from the Bharuch constituency in Gujarat earlier this month, entered into a verbal spat publicly after the former accused the latter of threatening a government officer, police said on Saturday. BJP's Bharuch MP Mansukh Vasava and AAP's Dediapada MLA Chaitar Vasava were seen engaged in a heated exchange of words on Friday at Dediapada in Narmada district of the state. The two leaders were surrounded by a large number of supporters, who also got into a verbal spat. It all began after BJP MP posted on X on Friday, in which he accused the AAP MLA of threatening Dediapada. *—PTI*

Kerala Youth Cong protest against CM, burns his effigy

T'PURAM, 18 MAY

The Youth Congress on Saturday held a protest march to the official residence of Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and burned his effigy outside the house demanding his resignation, alleging failure of law and order in the state. The march by the youth wing of the Congress was held on the same day the chief minister returned to the state after reportedly cutting short his vacation with family abroad. The Youth Congress protestors marched to Cliff House -- the official residence of the CM -- and shouted slogans terming Vijayan as the leader of the criminal gangs in the state and demanding his resignation, according to visuals shown on TV channels. The protestors also raised the issue of crimes against women, especially the instance of alleged domestic violence against a newly-wed bride. *—PTI*

Modi inciting people, dividing society, says Kharge

Uddhav Thackeray says 'acche din' coming after 4 June

MUMBAI, 18 MAY

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge with NCP (Sharad) Chief Sharad Pawar and Shiv Sena (UBT) Chief Uddhav Thackeray during an INDIA alliance press conference, in Mumbai PHOTO: PTI

Congress Chief Mallikarjun Kharge and other INDIA bloc leaders on Saturday slammed Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his claim that Opposition alliance would bulldoze the Ayodhya Ram temple if voted to power, and said they were committed to protecting the religious freedom of all citizens and ensuring that the country runs as per the Constitution.

Kharge also accused Modi of inciting people and dividing society through his election speeches. Kharge was addressing a press conference of INDIA bloc, where NCP (SP) Chief Sharad Pawar, Shiv Sena (UBT) President Uddhav Thackeray and other leaders were present.

"No Prime Minister before Modi has ever indulged in inciting people like he has been doing. He speaks about democracy repeatedly but doesn't adhere to the tenets of democracy," Kharge said.

Kharge said, "We have never used a bulldozer on anyone. Modi has the habit of lying and inciting people about things which Congress will never do or the things that are impossible to be implemented." Congress Chief assured that reservation as enshrined in the Constitution will continue and nobody can touch it. Speaking on the occasion, Thackeray said, "'Achche din' are coming from June 4 (when Lok Sabha poll results will be declared) when INDIA bloc-led government takes charge."

BJP is floating 'Pakistan flags in our rally' narrative to divert people's attention from issues like jobs, he alleged.

"Pakistan is in BJP's mind. Perhaps Modi still relishes (former Pakistan PM) Nawaz Sharif's birthday cake. Modi remembers Pakistan. I have never seen Pakistan flags in my rallies,"he said. *—PTI*

Congress seeks EC's action on PM Modi's 'bulldozer' remarks

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

Narendra Modi PHOTO: PTI

- Election Commission should take action against Modi ji and BJP for saying such things about the temple of God which is currently under construction by the trust

Congress on Saturday took strong objection to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's charge that the party will "bulldoze the Ram temple" if elected to power, accusing him of instigating people and demanded Election Commission takes action.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge said it is BJP that uses the bulldozer.

"It is BJP that uses the bulldozer. We have never run a bulldozer on anyone till date. The Election Commission should take action against Modi ji and BJP for saying such things about the temple of God which is currently under construction by the trust. By saying such things, they are creating anger among the public. They are inciting the public, they are instigating them. Modi, while campaigning in Uttar Pradesh, had claimed that Congress and SP will run a bulldozer over Ram temple if elected to power, and asked them to take lessons from Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on where bulldozers should be used.

Kharge said Modi is inciting people by saying such things that are impossible as "we cannot do such things".

"The people of the country know that this will never happen. After our government comes, everything will be protected. This is what our constitution says, we will work under the constitution only," he said. *—PTI*

Court to review chargesheet against Kejriwal on 20 May

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

PHOTO: PTI

The Rouse Avenue Court on Saturday fixed 20 May for consideration on Enforcement Directorate's (ED) Supplementary chargesheet (prosecution complaint) filed against Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) as accused in connection with a money laundering case related to Excise Policy case.

The Special Judge Kaveri Baweja on Saturday fixed the matter for Monday for arguments and ED's submissions on cognizance point.

On Friday Enforcement Directorate officials along with Special Public Prosecutor (SPP) Naveen Kumar Matta along with two ED officials filed the chargesheet in Rouse Avenue Court of Delhi.

Last week, ED during the hearing of Manish Sisodia's bail in Delhi High Court informed that AAP will also be made accused in the case and supplementary chargesheet. Recently, ED told Supreme Court that AAP will be made co-accused in the money laundering case linked to the Delhi excise policy case.

Appearing before a bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta, Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, for the ED, said a complaint against AAP is in the pipeline and there is direct evidence of its national convenor and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal demanding Rs 100 crore as kickbacks in the case.

Raju said there is evidence that Kejriwal demanded a bribe of Rs 100 crores which went to the AAP for Goa election expenses.

The ASG further contended that apart from vicarious liability as the head of the AAP, Kejriwal is also directly liable as the person who played a key role in formulating the excise policy. He said there was evidence to show that Kejriwal's stay in a seven-star hotel in Goa was partly funded by an accused. *—ANI*

AAP 'anti-aurat party', says BJP on Maliwal case

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

Maliwal's medical report has reportedly confirmed bruises on her, to hit out at AAP PHOTO: PTI

BJP on Saturday accused AAP of resorting to victim-shaming and victim-blaming in its brazen defence of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's aide Bibhav Kumar in the Swati Maliwal assault case.

BJP national Spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla alleged that Kejriwal is making efforts to protect Kumar as his aide is in a position to expose the chief minister's damaging "secrets".

In a swipe at the party, Poonawalla told reporters that AAP is essentially an "anti-aurat party (anti-women party)" as he cited past allegations of mistreatment of women involving its leaders.

With AAP claiming that Maliwal is acting at the BJP's behest, Poonawalla cited another AAP leader and Delhi Commission for Women member Vandana Singh's support to the Rajya Sabha MP to hit out at the party.

He noted Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury's criticism of AAP over the issue to ask if the Lok Sabha MP has also become a BJP agent, an allegation levelled against Maliwal by her party.

"AAP's corruption and misconduct is followed by disinformation. It has become the party's standard operating procedure," he said, comparing the Maliwal case with Draupadi's disrobing episode in the Mahabharata.

Kumar is merely a puppet, it is Kejriwal who holds the strings, Poonawalla alleged and attacked Opposition leaders such as Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Chaturvedi for not speaking up on the issue.

Noting that Kumar lodged a police complaint against Maliwal, who has accused him of assaulting her, four days after the incident occurred at the chief minister's residence, the BJP leader said he is clearly acting at Kejriwal's behest.

Poonawalla also cited Maliwal's medical report, which has reportedly confirmed bruises on her, to hit out at AAP.

Kumar was arrested on Saturday in connection with the alleged assault on Maliwal.

He was picked up from the Chief Minister's residence by a Delhi Police team around noon, a senior officer said. *—PTI*

AAP circulating 'edited' videos says BJP

New Delhi, 18 May

Delhi BJP Saturday accused AAP leaders of circulating "edited" videos to tarnish the image of their own party MP Swati Maliwal, who has accused an aide of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal of assaulting her. It is regrettable that "edited" videos are being circulated on social media groups since Friday in an attempt to "defame" Maliwal who is a member of the Aam Aadmi Party, Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva claimed. A couple of videos from Chief Minister's residence from the day of incident have surfaced on social media against Maliwal. *—PTI*

Modi's allegation of insult to UP, a 'cheap tactic', says Stalin

CHENNAI, 18 MAY

DMK President and Chief Minister MK Stalin on Saturday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of picking up a "cheap strategy" of stoking confrontation between states as his "propaganda of communal hatred" did not help.

Stalin slammed what he called Modi's "imaginary tales and bags of lies" by alleging that leaders of southern states including Tamil Nadu (INDIA bloc constituents) speaking in a derogatory manner, against people of Uttar Pradesh.

Days ago, Modi had alleged in a poll rally that Samajwadi Party and Congress's southern allies insulted Uttar Pradesh and Sanatana Dharma but the two parties remained quiet.

DMK President alleged that it was BJP that supported and encouraged fake news items, such as the false claims made by "YouTubers like Manish Kashyap" of assault on guest workers in Tamil Nadu. Such fake claims were hate propaganda aimed at creating divisions in society.

Kashyap was arrested last year by Tamil Nadu police for alleged circulation of fake videos on "attacks" in Tamil Nadu on migrant workers hailing from Bihar. Kashyap, who had been in jail in connection with that case, joined BJP last month.

Stalin lashed out at Modi saying he did not speak on removing the 50 per cent cap on reservation for Backward classes and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes people, a move that will be very beneficial for the people of Uttar Pradesh.

The Dravidian party chief, citing statistics said the patronage for Chennai MetroRail (CMRL) has increased significantly and accused Modi of scuttling the CMRL phase-II expansion in the Tamil Nadu capital city by not "releasing funds." *—PTI*

VOTE FROM HOME

Clockwise from left: Former vice president Hamid Ansari, former prime minister Manmohan Singh and former union minister Murli Manohar Joshi show their ink-marked fingers after casting votes through postal ballot PHOTO: PTI

M'RASHTRA CEO BATS FOR VOTER PARTICIPATION

THANE, 18 MAY

Maharashtra Chief Electoral Officer S Chockalingam has called for special initiatives to boost participation of voters, including house-to-house outreach programmes.

He was speaking to reporters in Maharashtra's Thane district while conducting a review of the election preparations in three constituencies of Thane, Kalyan and Bhiwandi. Elections to 13 Lok Sabha constituencies in north Maharashtra and Mumbai Metropolitan Region will be held on May 20. *—PTI*

CLASH OF RICHEST TITANS

Celebrity Kangana vs 'royal' Vikramaditya on Mandi seat

SHIMLA, 18 MAY

BJP's Kangana and Congress's Vikramaditya Singh PHOTO: PTI

Clash of the two richest titans, a celebrity and a 'royal', is on the cards in Himachal Pradesh's Mandi Lok Sabha constituency, known for electing erstwhile "royals" maximum number of times.

BJP has for the first time fielded a woman and a Bollywood celebrity in Kangana Ranaut who will take on Vikramaditya Singh, scion of the erstwhile Rampur "royal family" and son of six-time chief minister Virbhadra Singh.

Both the rivals have launched a high-pitched campaign, even with offensive outbursts.

Vikramaditya fired a salvo at Kangana asking about her vision about the development of the constituency. Taking a dig at his rival, he said she is on a month-long political tourism and would pack up, return to Bollywood after 4 June.

Returning the salvo, Kangana dubbed Vikramaditya as "Chhota Pappu" (junior Pappu). It was a mocking reference to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi who is often dubbed as "Pappu" or a novice by his political opponents.

Kangana's main agendas include restarting all the stalled projects besides improving connectivity to remote tribal areas, and popularising local cuisines and traditional attires, and promoting women-centric rural tourism in Seraj and Karsog.

The sprawling constituency spreads over six districts and comprises 17 Assembly segments. In the 2022 Assembly polls, BJP had won 12 Assembly. *—PTI*

STATEHOOD IN FOCUS: LADAKH CANDIDATE HANEEFA

KARGIL, 18 MAY

Amid a three-cornered fight in Ladakh, Independent candidate Mohammad Haneefa Jan said his focus remains on the demands such as safeguards under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution and statehood raised with the Union government.

Haneefa, who was a National Conference (NC) leader till recently, quit party along with the entire Kargil unit to contest Lok Sabha elections from Ladakh. While he belongs to Kargil, INDIA bloc's Tsering Namgyal and BJP's Tashi Gyalson are from Leh.

It is believed that being the lone candidate from Kargil gives Haneefa an edge over the other two candidates.

Of the around 1,84,000 voters in Ladakh, Kargil has around 95,000 voters while Leh has around 89,000 voters, according to the local officials. *—PTI*

6th schedule, employment key issues in Ladakh

LEH/KARGIL, 18 MAY

PHOTO: PTI

As Ladakh votes to elect its MP for the first time since the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution, safeguards under the sixth schedule, statehood and employment are the key issues in the two distant districts of the constituency that is the largest in the country in terms of area.

Padma Stanzin, a student leader from Leh, said employment is a major concern as not a single recruitment on a gazetted post has taken place since 2019.

The two main political parties in Ladakh are BJP, which has fielded Leh Autonomous Hill Development Council Chairman Tashi Gyalson in the election, and the Congress, which has picked the Leader of Opposition in the council, Tsering Namgyal, as its candidate. The third candidate is Mohammad Haneefa Jan from Kargil, popularly known as Haji Haneefa, who is contesting the polls as an independent after quitting the National Conference.

In its manifesto, Congress has promised safeguards under the sixth schedule, while Haneefa has mentioned all four demands. BJP's manifesto is silent on the sixth schedule and statehood, but Gyalson and other leaders of the party, during their campaign, have assured the locals that the talks will continue.

Locals say there is anger against BJP for not keeping its word on the sixth schedule. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Four killed, two injured in car-truck collision in Andhra

ANANTAPUR, 18 MAY

Four people were killed and two were critically injured after a car rammed into a truck on National Highway 44 in Andhra Pradesh's Anantapur district on Saturday, police said. Police official said that the accident took place near Bachupalli village in Gunti mandal of the district. The car en route from Hyderabad to Anantapur lost control and collided with a truck. The deceased and the injured individuals are from the same family from Anantapur's Rani Nagar, police said. The authorities are investigating the cause of the accident, the official said.*—ANI*

Murder accused jumps from train, escapes

KHANDWA, 18 MAY

A man arrested in connection with the murder of a local journalist escaped from police custody by jumping off a train in Madhya Pradesh's Khandwa while being taken to Uttar Pradesh on a transit remand, police said on Saturday.The absconding accused, Jamiruddin Qureshi, is one of the five persons booked for their alleged involvement in the murder of a journalist in Jaunpur in Uttar Pradesh on 13 May, said assistant sub-inspector Anni Lal of Khandwa Government Railway Police (GRP). Following the murder, Qureshi fled to Mumbai, and the crime branch of the Thane police apprehended him, he said. Two UP police personnel were bringing him to Jaunpur on transit remand on 15 May and were travelling on the Gorakhpur Weekly Express, the official said. *—PTI*

Man nabbed for anti-national slogan in MP

BHOPAL, 18 MAY

A man was arrested for allegedly raising anti-national slogans in Madhya Pradesh's capital Bhopal, the police said.According to a First Information Report (FIR), a copy of which is with ANI, the incident occurred under the jurisdiction of Misrod police station in Bhopal on Thursday (16 May) late evening and the case was registered into the matter on Friday evening. The accused has been identified as Faizal Khan, a resident of Mandideep, Raisen district, and he runs a puncture shop here in Bhopal. He was booked under IPC section 153 B (Imputations, assertions prejudicial to national-integration)."Complaint Brijesh Rao,26, a resident of Nai Basti Jatkhedi, Bhopal stated that on Thursday, he along with his friend Akhilesh Parmar had gone to eat paan at a kiosk. Meanwhile, a man present there was raising anti-national slogans (Pakistan Zindabad and Hindustan Murdabad). Both of them tried to convince him, but he did not listen," statement read in the FIR copy.*—PTI*

1 Naxal killed in encounter with forces in Ch'garh

SUKMA, 18 MAY

One Naxalite was killed in an encounter with security forces in the Sukma district of Chhattisgarh on Saturday, police said. The incident took place in the area between Tolnai and Tetrai villages. Meanwhile, SP Kiran Chavan has informed that the encounter operations are still underway. Further details are awaited. Earlier on 10 May, an exchange of fire broke out between Naxals and security forces in the jungle near Pidiya village in Chhattisgarh. The place where a gunfight broke out between the forces and the Naxals falls under the limits of Gangaloor Police Station.

—PTI

SC notice to centre, FSSAI over use of pesticides in food

The petion says, pesticides in food has become cause for cancers

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

The Supreme Court has sought a response from the Centre and Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) on a plea raising concern over the use and overuse of pesticides and other chemical insecticides on food crops and food items.

A bench of Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra issued notices to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the Ministry of Agriculture and FSSAI.

The top court was hearing a petition filed by environmentalist and lawyer, Akash Vashishtha which stated that the consumption of pesticide-laden foods has become the primary cause of cancers and other fatal ailments across the country.

The petition stated that the use of pesticides infood items, artificial colouring, coating is leading to high incidence of deaths *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

The petition stated that the use/overuse of pesticides and other chemical insecticides on food crops and food items, artificial colouring, coating and waxing of pulses, food grains and other items, is leading to a high incidence of deaths across the country.

The consumption of pesticide-laden foods has become the primary and predominant cause of cancers and other fatal ailments across the country, added the petition.

Appearing for the petitioner, senior advocate, Anitha Shenoy, told the apex court that the petitioner has collected data from across the country showing a very high number of deaths due to pesticides.

"There is an abject failure of the FSSAI to curb and control pesticides and ensure food safety. There is a direct scientific and medical correlation between pesticides and cancers, which are on the rise in the country," Shenoy apprised the top court. *—ANI*

- The top court was hearing a petition filed by environmentalist and lawyer, Akash Vashishtha which stated that the consumption of pesticide-laden foods has become primary cause of cancers

IMD WARNS

Met flags heatwave alert in North till 21 May; rains soon

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecast a heatwave and a severe heatwave condition across vast swathes of North India, including several parts of Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana and Delhi, between 17 and 21 May.

The premier weather forecasting agency said heatwave conditions were likely to prevail in parts of Uttar Pradesh from 17-21 May; in isolated pockets of Gujarat between 17 May and 21; Bihar from 17-20 May; Jharkhand between 19 and 20 May; north Madhya Pradesh from 18-21 May; Gangetic West Bengal between May 18 and 20; and Odisha on 20 and 21 May.

While a red alert for severe heatwave was issued for west Rajasthan, an Orange alert was also out for Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, East Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Gujarat. A yellow alert for a heatwave-like condition was issued as well for Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Gangetic West Bengal and Odisha. An area is considered to be in the grip of a heatwave if the maximum temperature at a weather station reaches at least 40°C and at least 30°C or more for hilly regions. *—PTI*

Amid prevailing heat waves, people use scarves to cover themselves during a hot summer day *PHOTO: ANI*

Kerala to receive heavy rains; IMD issues red alert in some dists

T'puram, 18 May

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Saturday predicted extremely heavy rainfall in Kerala in the coming days and issued a red alert in some districts of the state for 19 and 20 May. The IMD issued the red alert in Pathanamthitta, Kottayam and Idukki districts of the state for 19 and 20 May.

Southwest Monsoon to advance into South Anadaman Sea

Amid the sweltering heat in the northern plains, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said that the Southwest Monsoon would be reaching the south-east Bay of Bengal on Sunday. *—PTI*

HC PREVENTS USE OF JACKIE'S NAME COMMERCIALLY

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

The Delhi High Court has restrained various entities from using actor Jackie Shroff's name, including sobriquets "Jackie" and "Jaggu Dadda", voice and images for commercial purposes without permission.

Justice Sanjeev Narula, in an interim order dated 15 May, said the entities selling wallpapers, T-shirts and posters, etc. on e-commerce websites and operating an artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot platform were prima facie acting in violation of the actor's personality and publicity rights by exploiting and misappropriating his attributes. The judge also passed the direction against two content creators who published videos of Shroff with "extremely profane words and abuses".The court said Shroff is a celebrity and this status inherently grants him certain rights over his personality and associated attributes."The plaintiff has established a prima facie case for grant of an ex-parte injunction. Balance of convenience lies in his favour and against defendants no. 3-4, 6-7, 13 and 14. If an injunction is not granted in the present case, it will lead to irreparable loss/harm to the Plaintiff, not only financially but also with his right to live with dignity," the court observed. *—PTI*

FOR GUWAHATI HC

SC Collegium proposes making 2 judges permanent

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

The Supreme Court Collegium headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud has recommended to the Centre the names of two additional judges for appointment as permanent judges of the Gauhati High Court.

The Collegium, also comprising Justices Sanjiv Khanna and BR Gavai, recommended that Justice Rajesh Sekhri be appointed as an additional judge of the Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh High Court for a fresh term of one year with effect from 29 July, 2024.

"... the Collegium resolves to recommend that Justice Susmita Phukan Khaund and Justice Mitali Thakuria, additional judges, be appointed as permanent judges of the Gauhati High Court against the existing vacancies," said one of the Collegium resolutions uploaded on the apex court website.

It noted that the Collegium of the Gauhati High Court had unanimously recommended on 1 April the names of these two judges for appointment as permanent judges.

"The chief ministers of the States of Assam, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh and the Governors of the States of Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh have concurred with the recommendation," the resolution said.

It noted that with a view to assess the merit and suitability of the two additional judges for appointment as permanent judges, the Supreme Court Collegium scrutinised the material placed on record, including the opinion of the consultee-judges and the report of the judgement evaluation committee.

"Bearing in mind the above, the Collegium is of the view that Justice Susmita Phukan Khaund and Justice Mitali Thakuria, additional judges, are fit and suitable for being appointed as permanent judges," the Collegium resolution dated 17 May said.

In a separate resolution, the Supreme Court Collegium noted that the Collegium of the Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh High Court had on 23 April recommended that Justice Rajesh Sekhri be appointed as an additional judge for a fresh term, "there being no vacancy of permanent judge against which he could be considered".

—PTI

ISRO chairman recommends setting up libraries in temples

T'PURAM, 18 MAY

ISRO Chairman S Somanath on Saturday advocated for setting up libraries in temples, stating that such an initiative would help attract youngsters to places of worship.

Speaking after receiving an award instituted by the Sree Udiyannoor Devi Temple here, Somanath said temples should not only be places where elderly people come for nama japa (chanting the name of God), but they should also become places for "transforming society."

He urged temple managements to work towards attracting youngsters to temples.

"I expected youngsters in large numbers at this award presentation ceremony, but somehow their numbers are considerably low. Temple managements should work towards attracting them to the temples. Why not set up libraries in temples?" he asked after receiving the award from former ISRO chairman G Madhavan Nair.

He said that such an initiative would help attract youth to temples where they could read, discuss various issues in the evenings, and develop their careers. "If the temple managements work in that direction, it would bring big changes," Somanath said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Nilgiri Mountains train service cancelled due to earth slip on track

CHENNAI, 18 MAY

The Nilgiri Mountain Railway train service has been cancelled on Saturday owing to earth slip between Kallar - Hillgrove railway stations.

Mud and boulders fell on the rail line, obstructing traffic. "Hence, a train service of the NMR has been cancelled," a release from the railway said.

An earth slip occurred between Kallar – Hillgrove railway stations of the Nilgiri Mountain Railway, Train No.06136 Mettupalayam – Udagamandalam train, scheduled to leave Mettupalayam at 7.10am, has been cancelled on 18 May, the release said. Passengers of the cancelled train service will be given full refund of the ticket fare, it added. *—PTI*

- The Nilgiri Mountain Railway train service has been cancelled on Saturday owing to earth slip between Kallar - Hillgrove railway stations

300 weapons displayed at BSF's Museum

INDORE,18 MAY

At least three such "stick guns" are on display at the Arms Museum of the Central School of Armament and Warfare Skills (CSWT) of the Border Security Force (BSF) in Madhya Pradesh's Indore.

Set up in 1967 based on the vision of BSF Director General KF Rustomjee, the museum is home to 300 rare weapons, officials said on Friday on the eve of International Museum Day, observed on 18 May.

The museum's collection, sourced from different places, includes big weapons such as rocket launchers and machine guns of various sizes to mini pistols that can fit into one's palm, they said.

Talking to PTI, CSWT Inspector General BS Rawat said the museum displays weapons from the 14th century to the later periods.Rawat said the facility had also housed the pistol that freedom fighter Bhagat Singh used to kill British officer JP Saunders on 17 December, 1928, in Lahore. *—PTI*

A personnel displays vintage weapons exhibited at an arms museum of the Central School of Weapons and Tactics (CSWT) in Indore *PHOTO: PTI*

MISSING ACTOR GURUCHARAN SINGH RETURNS

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

Missing actor Gurucharan Singh, who played Roshan Singh Sodhi's character in TV serial 'Taarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah', returned home on Friday after 24 days, officials said.

According to a police officer, Singh had gone for a spiritual journey during which he visited several Gurudwaras and religious places in Punjab.

He returned home on Friday police officer said. *—PTI*

IN TRIPURA

Landless families spend night in forest

AGARTALA, 18 MAY

Around 30 to 40 families from different parts of North Tripura district have been spending nights in forest areas of Peku Cherra in the Panisagar subdivision of the same district in order to draw the attention of the government towards their plight of being landless.

According to them, they had homes built on government lands and hence they could be evicted from the place at any time. The sole purpose of the unique movement is to get permanent settlement through individual land titles issued by the Tripura government.

With the hope of a permanent settlement, the families shifted to the forest areas and set up makeshift huts using tarpaulin sheets and bamboo. Even as they believe their move would not bring a solution to their longstanding problem, they describe the act as an attempt to make the government hear their voices.

Families living in forest areas of Peku Cherra *PHOTO: ANI*

The families living here are undergoing different kinds of problems. According to Kartik Nama, his house located at the Jayashree area is built on a parcel of land that was recently allocated for the construction of a police station.

"We have come over here from the Jayashree area which falls under the jurisdiction of Dhanajay Para. We have been living in the Jayashree area for two generations now. Our house is located next to the police station. Recently, almost half of our land was occupied by the police station authorities. The other half is also allocated for other government construction works. If this situation persists, we won't have even an inch of land to live on," Nama told ANI.

Nama is also a beneficiary of the PM Awas Yojana but his desire to live in the new dwelling is shattered after the state government is now trying to retrieve the piece of land under his illegal possession.

On the other hand, Krishna Nath who hails from the Kanchanpur subdivision area said that his family took shelter in the forest area to avoid the ethnic tension that prevailed after displaced Brus were settled in their neighbourhood. His family also doesn't possess legal ownership of the land where they used to live before moving here. Meanwhile, Chief Minister Manik Saha had also spoken on the issue and said that the state government would look into the matter on humanitarian grounds. *—ANI*

Maitri Setu, Agartala-Akhaura rail link to start soon

AGARTALA, 18 MAY

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha said the Maitri Setu in South Tripura and Agartala-Akhaura (Bangladesh) rail link will become operational very soon.

The Matri Setu built over river Feni connecting South Tripura's Sabroom with Bangladesh's Ramgarh was jointly inaugurated on 9 March, 2021 and Agartala-Nischintapur (Indian part of Agartala-Akhaura rail link) was inaugurated on 1 November, 2023 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina.

But both connectivity facilities are yet to be made operational.

"Election is almost over, and a new government will be formed. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, who has always emphasised the Act East Policy and provided us with the HIRA (highway, i-way, railway, airway) model, the Maitri Setu will become operational soon", the Chief Minister told reporters on Friday.

"The trial in Agartala-Akhaura railway link has already been completed, and it will also be made operational soon," Saha said, adding that many investors are coming to the northeastern state to invest.

Anil Kumar Khandelwal, Member Infrastructure, Railway Board inspected Nischintapur railyard (Indian part of Agartala–Akhaura) on May 15 to check the ongoing work."The construction work in Agartala-Akhaura railway project has almost been completed. Now, the train service will be made operational after discussion between both sides," he said. *—PTI*

- The Matri Setu built over river Feni connecting Tripura's with Bangladesh's Ramgarh was inaugurated on 9 March, 2021

SRI LANKA'S CIVIL WAR

Sri Lankan Tamil civil war survivors perform rituals in memory of their deceased family members on a small strip of land where civilians were trapped during the last stages of the war in Mullivaikkal, Sri Lanka, Saturday, 17 May, 2024. Ethnic Tamils commemorated the 15th anniversary of the bloody end to Sri Lanka's civil war, lighting lamps and offering flowers at the site where thousands of people are said to have been killed and maimed in the final stages of the fighting ***PHOTO: PTI***

Protests in Pakistan-ruled Kashmir expose grievances

Activists in Pakistan-administered Kashmir say protests over soaring reflect larger problems ***PHOTO: PTI***

Activists in Pakistan-administered Kashmir say the recent protests over soaring food and energy costs reflect larger problems involving the semi-autonomous region's local government and the central government in Islamabad.

On Monday evening, four people, including one police officer, were killed after paramilitary forces, called rangers, responded to protests in the regional capital of Pakistan-administered Kashmir, Muzaffarabad. An estimated 100 people were injured.

Authorities also shut off internet services and closed schools in response to the unrest.

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif approved $82 million (₹75 million) worth of subsidies on Tuesday in a bid to defuse the situation by partly meeting the protesters' demands.

The head of the semi-autonomous administration, Chaudhry Anwar ul Haq, said that the funds would be used to substantially lower the price of flour and electricity.

Akhter Ali, a fruit vendor from Muzaffarabad, told DW that this week's uprising in the region had been "unprecedented."

"The soaring inflation was unbearable, so this huge people's protest was required," he said.

Shaukat Nawaz Mir, chairman of the Jammu Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC), a civil society group that organized a protest march, told DW that the local government was "incompetent" and had "miserably failed to serve the people."

He added that after the intervention of the federal government, the JAAC wanted also to see the Muzaffarabad government "invest in its people."

Long history of tension in Kashmir

Many tensions in Pakistan-administered Kashmir center on the territory's legal status as semi-autonomous. The region has a strong sense of tradition and identity separate from Pakistan.

Since the partition of India after the end of British colonial rule in 1947, life in the Kashmir valley has been shaped by ongoing conflict between India and Pakistan. The region is claimed in full by both countries, but ruled in part by each. This status as a conflict zone has severely hampered investment in the economy.

Indian-administered Kashmir had semi-autonomous status until 2019, when New Delhi scraped guarantees enshrined in "Article 370" of India's constitution and took direct control over the territory.

Pakistan-administered Kashmir, locally known as "Azad Jammu Kashmir," is run by a semi-autonomous government. The territory of 4 million people has its own parliament and prime minister.

However, many people believe this semi-autonomy only exists on paper, and consider the local government as a "puppet" of Islamabad.

This sentiment has grown more intense recently, with activists blaming the machinations of government in Islamabad for the economic crisis.

"These protests are continuation of a year-long movement for the restoration of basic rights and an end to the exploitation of resources by Islamabad and its puppets in the occupied region," Toqeer Gilani, president of Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), an activist group, said.

The unrest began on Friday evening after a group of traders started a strike in Muzaffarabad that ended up in clashes with police forces.

It came after at least a year of activists demanding more action from the regional government to address skyrocketing food and energy prices.

One demand is the reduction of electricity costs, considering it is generated by the hydroelectric Mangla Dam which is located in the region.

Activists said it was long-running dissatisfaction that allowed the protests to quickly gain traction and gather tremendous support from all sections of society, especially from those who find themselves more and more unable to afford food and energy.

Call for a change in behavior

The economic woes faced in Pakistan-administered Kashmir are also reflected in Pakistan proper, as the country deals with an ongoing financial crisis. Activists blame mismanagement and interference from Islamabad for exacerbating economic problems in Kashmir.

Gilani said that locals were beginning to "understand" that "actually it is Islamabad who is responsible for all their miseries," and added that the recent protests had triggered a larger movement calling for change in the behavior of Pakistan's [military] establishment.

"Everyone in Azad Kashmir is frustrated due the looting of resources by Pakistan establishment, bad governance, poor infrastructure and Islamabad's dubious role in a 77- year-long inhumane occupation of the region by India and Pakistan," he said.

Pakistan's prime minister has dubbed the protests "worrisome," saying some people want to destabilize the region.

"Certainly, among those driving this movement were individuals who, with their legitimate demands, were fulfilling their duty in a democratic manner. However, it cannot be denied that there were some malicious elements whose sole purpose was to cause destruction, loss of human lives and create chaos in Azad Jammu and Kashmir," he said on Thursday during a visit to the region. *—DW News*

SALAR ساہر

50L large farmland trees vanished between 2018 & 2022

Due to altered cultivation practice, trees are gone ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

More than 50 lakh large farmland trees vanished between 2018 and 2022 in India, partly due to altered cultivation practices, revealing a "concerning trajectory.

Researchers said that "an observable trend was emerging" wherein agroforestry systems are being replaced with paddy rice fields, even as a certain loss rate could be found to be natural.

Large and mature trees within these agroforestry fields are removed, and trees are now being cultivated within separate block plantations typically with lower ecological value, they said.

Block plantations, usually involving fewer species of trees, were found to have increased in numbers which some villagers from Telangana, Haryana, Maharashtra and other states confirmed.

The team, including researchers from the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, explained that the decision to remove trees is often driven by perceived low benefits of the trees, coupled with concerns that their shading effect, including that of Neem trees, may adversely affect crop yields.

Boosting crop yields also contributed to the expansion of paddy rice fields, further facilitated by water supply which was augmented by the establishment of new boreholes, the authors said.

"This finding is particularly unsettling given the current emphasis on agroforestry as an essential natural climate solution, playing a crucial role in both climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies, as well as for livelihoods and biodiversity," the authors wrote.

Agroforestry trees are a vital part of India's landscapes as they generate socio-ecological benefits, along with being a natural climate solution owing to their ability to absorb carbon dioxide from the air.

However, despite their importance, the lack of robust monitoring mechanisms has contributed to an insufficient grasp of their distribution in relation to management practices, as well as their vulnerability to climate change and diseases, the researchers said.

For the study, the team used AI-based deep learning models for detecting individual non-forest trees for each year. By tracking the tree crown over the years, they then analysed the changes. Crowns of multiple trees together form a canopy.

The researchers mapped about 60 crore farmland trees, excluding block plantations, and tracked them over the past decade.

They found that around 11 per cent of the large trees, each having a crown size of 96 square metres and mapped in 2010/2011, had disappeared by 2018.

"Moreover, during the period 2018–2022, more than 5 million large farmland trees (about 67 square metres crown size) have vanished, due partly to altered cultivation practices, where trees within fields.

The researchers clarified that while the findings may appear to contradict official reports and studies showing that tree cover has increased in recent years, they reported only gross losses and did not look at tree gains as a separate class.

—Courtesy Downtoearth

Large and mature trees within these agroforestry fields are removed, and trees are now being cultivated within separate block plantations typically with lower ecological value ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Manthan: The film at Cannes made by half a million farmers

Many villagers of Gujarat acted in the film, which was produced by milk farmers ***PHOTO: BBC***

In the mid-1970s, half a million dairy farmers in India's western state of Gujarat contributed two rupees each to make a ground-breaking film.

Manthan (The Churning), directed by venerated filmmaker Shyam Benegal, became the country's first crowd-funded film.

The 134-minute 1976 film was a fictionalised narrative of the genesis of a dairy cooperative movement that transformed India from a milk-deficient nation to the world's leading milk producer. The story drew inspiration from Verghese Kurien - known as the "Milkman of India" for revolutionising milk production in the country. (India today accounts for nearly a quarter of the global milk production.)

Nearly 50 years after it was made, a pristinely restored Manthan is receiving a red-carpet world premiere this week at the Cannes Film Festival, alongside classics from Jean-Luc Godard, Akira Kurosawa and Wim Wenders. Restoring the film was a challenge, according to Shivendra Singh Dungarpur, award-winning filmmaker, archivist and restorer.

All that remained of Manthan was a damaged negative and two faded prints. The negative had been ravaged by fungus, leaving vertical green lines across many sections. The sound negative was entirely destroyed, forcing the restorers to rely on the sound from the sole surviving print.

The restorers salvaged the negative and one of the prints. They borrowed and digitised the sound from the print, and repaired the film. The scanning and digital clean-up were conducted at a Chennai lab under the supervision of a renowned Bologna-based film restoration lab, with both Benegal and his long-time cinematographer Govind Nihalani overseeing the project. The film's sound was fixed and improved at the Bologna lab.

Some 17 months later, Manthan was reborn in ultra high definition 4K. Benegal, one of the doyens of Indian cinema, says the film remains very close to his heart.

"It is wonderful to see the film come back to life almost like we made it yesterday. It looks better than the first print," the 89-year-old filmmaker says.

Benegal recounts that, egged on by Kurien, he had produced several documentaries on Operation Flood - India's milk revolution - and rural marketing initiatives. When he suggested a feature film to Kurien, saying that documentaries mainly reached those "converted to the cause", Kurien balked.

Under the cooperative model, small farmers would bring and sell milk in the mornings and evenings to a network of collection centres in Gujarat. The milk was then transported to dairies for processing into butter and other products.

Kurien proposed that the collection centres deduct two rupees from each farmer, enabling all of them to become producers. The collected funds financed the making of the film. "The farmers readily agreed because we were telling their story," says Benegal.

Manthan boasted a stellar cast, featuring Girish Karnad, Smita Patil, Naseeruddin Shah, Amrish Puri, Kulbhushan Kharbanda and Mohan Agashe in key roles. Vijay Tendulkar, a prominent Indian playwright, contributed multiple scripts, with Benegal selecting one for the film. Renowned composer Vanraj Bhatia scored the music.

In the film, a city-bred government veterinary doctor and his team arrive in a deeply divided village in Gujarat with plans to start a dairy cooperative. As he starts his work, the vet is caught in the tumultuous politics of change and faces challenges from a private dairy owner, the village head and a volatile local milkman..

Money was tight and the 45-day shoot was a challenge. Nihalani remembers using a "patchwork of different film stocks" to shoot the film. The crew lived as a close-knit family in the village, where many residents also acted in the film. The cast did not change their costumes throughout the shooting, so "that they looked worn in the village", said Datta.

Naseeruddin Shah, who began his acting career with Benegal and later became one of India's best-known actors, remembers living the film during its making.

Kurien released the film initially in Gujarat to a rousing reception. "The film did brilliantly because its largest audience was also the film's producers. Every day we had this incredible sight of truckloads of people coming in from all over to see the film," says Benegal.

More copies of this film were produced than any other in India, spanning formats from 35mm to 8mm, Super 8, and later, video cassettes. Manthan was widely shown around the world, including at the UN General Assembly, and won a National Award at home.

Manthan's success gave Kurien another idea. Using the film to propagate the milk revolution, he distributed 16mm prints to villages nationwide, urging farmers to establish their own cooperatives.

In real life imitating reel life, he sent teams comprising a vet, a milk technician and a fodder specialist to distribute and show the film to farmers.

Benegal says Manthan "serves as a powerful reminder of cinema's ability to drive change". The film also retains surprising relevance today, as it explores a range of issues that continue to bedevil contemporary India.

Trains, still notorious for running late, set the stage for the film's opening scene. A passenger train, carrying the doctor and his assistant, pulls into a tranquil village station. Locals, slightly tardy, rush down the platform to welcome their guests with garlands.

—BBC News

PHOTO: X/@ROBERTFICO

Slovak PM assassination: Suspect in court

PEZINOK, 18 MAY

Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico 's condition was stable but serious Saturday as the man accused of trying to assassinate him faced his first court appearance. Two hours of surgery Friday to remove dead tissue from Fico's multiple gunshot wounds "contributed to a positive prognosis," Health Minister Zuzana Dolinkova said outside University F D Roosevelt hospital in Banska Bystrica, where Fico was taken by helicopter after the shooting. Fico, 59, was attacked as he greeted supporters following a government meeting Wednesday in the former coal mining town of Handlova. The suspect was tackled to the ground and arrested. Fico's condition is still too grave to transport him to the capital, Bratislava, Defence Minister Robert Kalinak said. The update on Fico's health was issued as the man accused of attempting to assassinate him made his first court appearance, according to Slovak state media. Prosecutors were seeking an order from Slovakia's Specialised Criminal Court to detain the suspect. *—AP*

SL Tamils observe 15th anniversary of armed conflict

COLOMBO, 18 MAY

Sri Lanka on Saturday marked the 15th anniversary of the end of the armed separatist campaign with Tamils holding a series of events throughout the former conflict zone in the north and east regions to remember their dear ones killed in the clashes. In many areas, police and the government troops were accused of attempting to disrupt the memorial events. LTTE had run a military campaign for a separate Tamil homeland in the northern and eastern provinces of the island nation for nearly 30 years before its collapse in 2009. *—PTI*

US conducts subcritical nuclear test

WASHINGTON, 18 MAY

The United States conducted a subcritical nuclear test at Nevada earlier this week, according to a statement released by the US Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration. The experiment, the third under the administration of President Joe Biden, was carried out on Tuesday to collect "essential data" regarding the country's nuclear warheads, according to the National Nuclear Security Administration. The experiment was the first in the Nimble series, executed at the Principal Underground Laboratory for Subcritical Experimentation facility in partnership with Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. *—ANI*

Pak in talks with IMF for 'longer and larger' bailout

ISLAMABAD, 18 MAY

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) confirmed that the talks with Pakistan are underway on the 24th 'longer and larger' bailout programme under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF), reported ARY News. While addressing a press briefing, IMF Communication Director Julie Kozack, avoided answering about the staff-level agreement, indicating that the negotiations are still ongoing. "Right now, a mission team led by Nathan Porter is meeting with Pakistan authorities this week to discuss the next phase of our engagement," Kozack said. She noted that on April 29, the IMF Executive Board completed the second review of the stand-by arrangement for Pakistan, allowing a disbursement of about USD 1.1 billion, ARY News reported. *—ANI*

Ukraine fears new Russian offensive

Zelenskyy says it may only be the 'first wave'

KIYV, 18 MAY

Russia's offensive in Ukraine's northeastern border region of Kharkiv may just be the "first wave" in a wider assault, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has warned as he appealed to allies to send more air defence and fighter jets.

Russian forces, which had made only moderate advances in recent months, launched a surprise assault in the Kharkiv region on 10 May that resulted in their biggest territorial gains in a year and a half.

Zelenskyy conceded on Friday, in an interview with the AFP news agency, that Ukraine only has a quarter of the air defences it needs to hold the front line while the war grinds on. He said Russian forces managed to advance between five to 10km (3-6 miles) along the northeastern border before being stopped by Ukrainian forces.

On Saturday, Kharkiv's Governor Oleg Synegubov said "a total of 9,907 people have been evacuated" from the region following a ground attack by Russian troops. Al Jazeera's John Holman, reporting from Kharkiv, said that at present Ukraine is "outmanned in terms of soldiers" in parts of the front line even before the latest Russian attacks.

Russian forces launched a surprise assault PHOTO: AP

"Ukraine said that there were seven Russian soldiers to one Ukrainian soldier, so that's going to put fresh pressure on them," he said. In an effort to increase troop numbers, Zelenskyy signed two laws, one to enable prisoners to join the army and another that increases fines for draft dodgers fivefold, which go into effect on Saturday.

The president acknowledged that Russian forces were "going deeper into our territory", adding that in order to achieve at least a level of air "parity" with Russia, Ukraine needs "120 to 130" F-16 fighter jets or other advanced aircraft.

"Today, we have about 25 percent of what we need to defend Ukraine. I'm talking about air defence," he told AFP. President Vladimir Putin said on Friday that the offensive in the Kharkiv region is aimed at creating a buffer zone and Russia has no plans to capture the city of Kharkiv.

Speaking to reporters while on a visit to China, Putin said Moscow launched its attacks in response to Ukrainian shelling of Russia's neighbouring Belgorod region. "I have said publicly that if it continues, we will be forced to create a security zone, a sanitary zone," he said. "That's what we are doing."

—Al Jazeera

Flash floods due to rains kill at least 68 in Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD, 18 MAY

Flash floods from heavy seasonal rains in the province of Ghor in western Afghanistan have killed at least 68 people, a Taliban official said on Saturday, adding the death toll was based on preliminary reports and might rise.

Dozens others remain missing, said Abdul Wahid Hamas, spokesman for Ghor's provincial governor. He also said the province suffered significant financial losses after thousands of homes and properties were damaged and hundreds of hectares of agricultural land destroyed following Friday's floods, including the capital city Feroz Koh.

The area suffered significant financial losses after thousands of homes and properties were damaged PHOTO: AP

Last week, the UN food agency said the unusually heavy seasonal rains in Afghanistan have killed more than 300 people and destroyed thousands of houses, mostly in the northern province of Baghlan, which bore the brunt of floods on 10 May.

Survivors have been left with no home, no land, and no source of livelihood, the World Food Organisation said. Most of Baghlan is "inaccessible by trucks," said WFP, adding that it is resorting to every alternative it can think of to deliver food to the survivors

The latest disaster came on the heels of devastating floods that killed at least 70 people in April. The waters also destroyed about 2,000 homes, three mosques and four schools in western Farah and Herat, and southern Zabul and Kandahar provinces.

—AP

Singapore faces new Covid wave, 25,900 cases reported

SINGAPORE, 18 MAY

Singapore is seeing a new Covid-19 wave as the authorities recorded more than 25,900 cases from May 5 to 11 even as Health Minister Ong Ye Kung on Saturday advised the wearing of masks again.

"We are at the beginning part of the wave where it is steadily rising," said Ong. "So, I would say the wave should peak in the next two to four weeks, which means between mid- and end of June," The Straits Times newspaper quoted the minister as saying.

The Ministry of Health (MOH) said the estimated number of Covid-19 cases in the week of May 5 to 11 rose to 25,900 cases, compared with 13,700 cases in the previous week. The average daily Covid-19 hospitalisations rose to about 250 from 181 the week before. The average daily intensive care unit (ICU) cases remained low at three cases, compared with two cases in the previous week. The MOH said that to protect hospital bed capacity, public hospitals have been asked to reduce their non-urgent elective surgery cases and move suitable patients to transitional care facilities or back home through Mobile Inpatient Care@Home, an alternative inpatient care delivery model that offers clinically suitable patients the option of being hospitalised in their own homes instead of a hospital ward. Ong urged those who are at greatest risk of severe disease, including individuals aged 60 years and above, medically vulnerable individuals and residents of aged care facilities, to receive an additional dose of the Covid-19 vaccine if they have not done so in the last 12 months.

xxxxx PHOTO: PTI

Ong said that if the number of Covid-19 cases doubles one time, Singapore will have 500 patients in its healthcare system, which is what Singapore can handle. However, if the number of cases doubles a second time, there will be 1,000 patients, and "that will be a considerable burden on the hospital system", he pointed out. *—PTI*

S Korea says N Korea fired 'ballistic missiles'

SEOUL, 18 MAY

North Korea has test-fired short-range "ballistic missiles" towards the Sea of Japan, the South Korean military said, a day after it conducted joint drills with the United States using stealth fighter jets to simulate air combat. The missiles tested on Friday were equipped with a "new autonomous navigation system", the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported on Saturday. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un oversaw the test launch and promised to boost the country's nuclear force, KCNA said. In a brief statement on Friday, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the launches were made from North Korea's eastern coast region of Wonsan and described the tests as "several flying objects presumed to be short-range ballistic missiles". The statement did not provide further details of the latest launches but added that an analysis was under way.

It said the suspected missiles travelled about 300km before splashing down in waters between South Korea and Japan. On Thursday, two South Korean F-35As and two US F-22 Raptors conducted aerial exercises over the central region of South Korea. Such drills infuriate North Korea, which views them as rehearsals for invasion.

North Korean state media reported that its military has been testing multiple launch rocket systems that are being upgraded.

North Korea also denounced a plan by South Korea and the US to stage joint annual military exercises in August, warning they could face a "catastrophic aftermath" if the drills are carried out.

—Al Jazeera

PROTESTS ERUPT

Israel's army says three hostages' bodies recovered

PALESTINE, 18 MAY

Israeli forces have recovered the bodies of three hostages from Gaza, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) say.

The bodies were those of Shani Louk, Amit Buskila, and Itzhak Gelerenter, it said. The IDF said they had been murdered on 7 October and their remains taken back to Gaza. Local media reported that the bodies were found in a Hamas tunnel.

About 1,200 people were killed in an unprecedented attack when Hamas gunmen burst into Israel. They took 252 others back to Gaza as hostages. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the news "heart-breaking".

"We will return all of our hostages, the living and the deceased alike," he said. In a statement, the IDF said the bodies had been recovered in an operation overnight. It said it had acted on intelligence gleaned from "interrogations of terrorists" who had been detained in Gaza.

It said the three victims had been killed at an intersection near the site of the Nova festival massacre in southern Israel, before their bodies were taken to Gaza. More than 360 people were killed at the festival.

About 125 hostages remain unaccounted for, with the others having been released or rescued.

—BBC News

Shani Louk, Itzhak Gelerenter, and Amit Buskila PHOTO: BRINGHOMENOW ON INSTAGRAM

Houthis claim shooting down another US drone

DUBAI, 18 MAY

Yemen's Houthi rebels on Friday claimed to have shot down an American drone, hours after footage circulated online of what appeared to be the wreckage of an MQ-9 Reaper drone.

Early Saturday, a vessel also came under attack in the Red Sea. The two incidents likely represent just the latest attacks by the Houthis as they press their campaign over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip. Houthi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree claimed that rebels shot down the Reaper on Thursday with a surface-to-air missile.

He described the drone as "carrying out hostile actions" in Yemen's Marib province, which remains held by allies of Yemen's exiled, internationally recognised government. The Houthis later released footage they claimed showed the surface-to-air-missile being launched at night, along with night-vision footage of the missile hitting the drone.

A man, whose voice had been digitally altered to apparently prevent identification, chanted the Houthi slogan: "God is the greatest; death to America; death to Israel; curse the Jews; victory to Islam." Online video showed wreckage resembling the pieces of the Reaper on the ground, as well as footage of that wreckage on fire.

The US military did not respond to a request for comment from Associated Press over the Houthi claim. *—AP*

Bus crashing into the highway's divider and colliding with an incoming vehicle PHOTO: X/SCREENGRAB

Pak: 13 of a family killed in accident

LAHORE, 18 MAY

At least 13 people of a family, including five children, were killed and nine injured when a mini-truck in which they were travelling skidded off the road and fell into a ravine in Pakistan's Punjab province on Saturday, rescue officials said.

According to Rescue 1122, the vehicle was coming from the Bannu district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province to the Khushab district of Punjab when the accident occurred. The mini-truck, while negotiating a turn, skidded off the road and fell into a ravine at Pench Pir area of Khushab, some 250 kilometres from Lahore.

"As many as 13 people, including five children, died on the spot. Nine injured have been shifted to a hospital where their condition is stated to be critical," an official said. Rescue officials said the deceased and the injured belonged to an extended family who were coming to Khushab for labour work. According to a couple of eyewitnesses, the driver lost control of the vehicle because of over-speeding.

Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz expressed her grief over the loss of lives in the accident and directed the authorities to provide the injured with the best treatment facilities. *—PTI*

Pak: Dengue outbreak claims 14 lives in Turbat

TURBAT, 18 MAY

A dengue outbreak in Turbat has resulted in the deaths of at least 14 patients, with over 5,000 individuals diagnosed with the disease in the Kech district of Makran division this year, Dawn reported.

Abu-Bakar, the district health officer of Kech, confirmed to Dawn on Friday, "As many as 14 people died of dengue in Turbat alone, the district headquarters of Kech district, during the last two months." He revealed that out of 24,552 individuals screened this year, 5,329 tested positive for dengue.

The fatalities occurred across various villages in Turbat. Despite the significant number of deaths and cases, the health department has not declared an emergency in Kech district nor provided adequate treatment facilities for patients, as reported by Dawn.

"Mos patients face difficulties due to the lack of proper testing and laboratory facilities in government and private hospitals in the district," expressed Mubarak Baloch, a patient. "I have been suffering from the dengue virus for the last week and have received no proper treatment." Master Azad Baloch, shared his concern about inconsistencies in test reports from different hospitals, highlighting the challenges faced by patients seeking accurate diagnoses. *—ANI*

SUN STORMS STRENGTHEN

Northern lights possible in coming weeks

THANE, 23 JAN

There is good news for anyone who enjoyed the show-stopping aurora borealis last weekend - or missed it: there are almost certainly more on the way.

The huge sunspot cluster that hurled energy and gas towards Earth will rotate back towards us in around two weeks. Scientists say it will probably still be large and complex enough to generate more explosions that could hit Earth's magnetic field, creating more Northern Lights.

Since last Saturday, the Sun has continued pumping out increased radiation - a huge solar flare on Tuesday disrupted high-frequency radio communications globally.

And this hyperactive sunspot won't be the last. The Sun is approaching what is called "solar maximum" - a point during an 11-year cycle when its activity is strongest.

That happens when the Sun's magnetic poles flip - a process that creates sunspots that fire out material, generating space weather. This solar cycle is the 25th since humans started systematically observing sunspots in 1755. It was expected to be quiet, but scientists say it is looking stronger than expected.

The intensity of a cycle is estimated by the number of these sunspots, explains Krista Hammond, a space weather forecaster at the Met Office.

But that doesn't actually tell us how strong the storms will be when they reach Earth, she says.

The huge sunspot cluster that hurled energy and gas towards Earth will rotate back towards us in around two weeks PHOTO: X/@THECHAIRMANGB

Solar Flipping

The geomagnetic storm last weekend was a one-in-30 year event and the biggest since 2003, says Sean Elvidge, a professor in space environment at the University of Birmingham. It was caused by at least five coronal mass ejections (CMEs) - eruptions of magnetic fields and solar storms - leaving the Sun in close succession. They took around 18 hours to reach Earth - where the CMEs interacted with our magnetic field. This magnetosphere is what shields us from all that immensely powerful radiation - without it, there would be no life on Earth. *—BBC News*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Dalmia Bharat begins production at new unit in TN

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

Cement maker Dalmia Bharat Ltd has commenced production at its new mill in Ariyalur manufacturing unit in Tamil Nadu, according to a regulatory filing by the company. With the commencement of commercial production of this 1 MTPA cement unit, the total cement manufacturing capacity of the company stands at 45.6 MTPA, it said. This is in line with the company's long-term growth strategy aimed at increasing its total installed capacity to 110 -130 MT by 2031, it said. "We continue to focus on strategic capital expenditure, maximising on the region's growth prospects and further enhance our market position in the South," Dalmia Bharat Managing Director & CEO, Puneet Dalmia said. *—PTI*

Delhivery Q4 net loss narrows to ₹68 crore

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

Logistics company Delivery has said its consolidated net loss narrowed to Rs 68.4 crore in the March 2024 quarter, aided by higher income. It had posted a Rs 158.6 crore net loss in the year-ago period, the company said in an exchange filing on Friday. The company's total income in the quarter under review increased to Rs 2,194.5 crore from Rs 1,934.2 crore a year ago. Its expenses were Rs 2,257.2 crore against Rs 2,107.6 crore a year ago. For the full 2024 fiscal, the company's net loss declined to Rs 259.2 crore from Rs 1,007.7 crore in FY23. The company's board has also approved the incorporation of a wholly-owned subsidiary for manufacturing drones and freight air transport services. *—PTI*

Merger of IDFC with IDFC First Bank gets nod

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

Shareholders and non-convertible debenture (NCD) holders of IDFC First Bank have approved a proposal to merge parent IDFC Ltd with the lender. The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) convened a meeting on 17 May through video conferencing and other audio-visual means to consider and approve the composite scheme of amalgamation for IDFC First Bank, the bank said in a regulatory filing. As part of the composite scheme of amalgamation, IDFC FHCL would first merge with IDFC and then IDFC into IDFC First Bank Ltd. Under the proposed reverse merger scheme, an IDFC shareholder will get 155 shares for every 100 shares she/he holds in the bank. *—PTI*

Banking industry doyen N Vaghul dies at 88

MUMBAI, 18 MAY

Veteran banker N Vaghul died on Saturday afternoon due to health complications, sources said. He was 88. Vaghul, who held many leadership positions in the banking industry, is credited with transforming ICICI from a public finance institution to a private sector bank in his 11-year stint as the chairman and managing director, starting in 1985. He was admitted to a private hospital in Chennai due to some health complications and was on ventilator support, as per the sources. The last rites of Vaghul, who was honoured with the country's third highest civilian award Padma Bhushan in 2006, are expected to be held in Chennai later this evening, according to the sources. Vaghul started his career as an officer with the State Bank of India in the pre-liberalisation era of the 1960s. *—PTI*

Nepal bans sale of Indian spice-mix products

MDH & Everest spices were banned over alleged quality concerns

KATHMANDU, 18 MAY

After Singapore and Hong Kong, Nepal has also banned the sale and import of certain spice-mix products manufactured by Indian brands over alleged quality concerns.

Four spice-mix products by MDH and Everest were banned in the Himalayan nation from Friday due to suspected ethylene oxide or EtO contamination, according to the Department of Food Technology and Quality Control here.

Under this, Madras Curry Powder, Sambhar Mixed Masala Powder; Mixed Masala Curry Powder of MDH and Fish Curry Masala of Everest have been banned in Nepal.

"As residue contents of ethylene oxide are found to be exceeding the prescribed limit in these four products, the import and sale of these products are banned within the country as per Article 19 of the Food Regulation 2027 BS," the department said in a notice issued on Friday.

Four spice-mix were banned due to EtO contamination **PHOTO: PIXABAY**

"Our serious attention has been drawn towards media reports about the sale of these sub-standard products in the market, and they are harmful for consumption," it said.

The food quality control watchdog has also urged importers and traders to recall these products from the market.

Last month, Singapore and Hong Kong halted sales of some spices produced by MDH and Everest over suspected elevated levels of ETO linked with some cancers.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has since initiated steps to examine the quality of powdered spices from various brands in the country.

On Friday, the Federation of Indian Spice Stakeholders (FISS) said India's spice export may decline nearly 40 per cent in FY25 if the issue of ethylene oxide contamination in spices meant for exports is not addressed at the earliest.

India is among the world's leading spice producers, exporting over 200 spices and value-added products to some 180 countries worth USD 4 billion in 2021-22. *—PTI*

AT STRATEGIC DIALOGUE

India & UK reaffirm Free Trade agreement

LONDON, 18 MAY

India and Britain have reaffirmed their commitment to conclude a mutually beneficial free trade agreement (FTA) at the annual UK-India Strategic Dialogue here, as the two sides reflected the "good progress" on the 2030 Roadmap since the last review.

Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra, who is on a visit to the UK, held discussions with his counterpart, Sir Philip Barton, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) on Friday.

The India-UK FTA negotiations, which opened in January 2022, are aimed at significantly enhancing bilateral trade – currently worth around 38.1 billion pounds a year as per official statistics from earlier this year. The talks are now in their 14th round of talks, going at a slower pace during the phased Indian general elections.

The 2030 Roadmap was clinched between India and the UK in 2021 and includes commitments to deepen cooperation on health, climate, trade, education, science and technology, and defence by 2030. The Indian industry is demanding greater access for its skilled professionals from sectors like IT and healthcare in the UK market, besides market access for several goods at nil customs duty.

On the other hand, the UK is seeking a significant cut in import duties on goods such as scotch whiskey, electric vehicles, lamb meat, chocolates, and certain confectionary items. Britain is also looking for more opportunities for UK services in Indian markets *—PTI*

Markets end special trading session with gains

30-share BSE Sensex climbed 88.91 points to end at 74,005.94 **PHOTO: PTI**

MUMBAI, 18 MAY

Equity benchmark indices closed the special trading session on a firm note on Saturday, extending their rally to the third day running amid fresh foreign fund inflows.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 88.91 points or 0.12 per cent to end at 74,005.94. During the session, it jumped 245.73 points or 0.33 per cent to 74,162.76.

The NSE Nifty advanced 35.90 points or 0.16 per cent to 22,502.

The National Stock Exchange (NSE) and BSE on May 7 said they will conduct a special trading session in the equity and equity derivative segments on May 18 to check their preparedness for handling major disruptions or failures at the primary site.

The special live trading session will have an intra-day switchover from the Primary Site (PR) to the Disaster Recovery (DR) site.

In separate circulars, the two exchanges said there will be two sessions -- the first from 9:15 am to 10 am from the PR, and the second from 11:30 am to 12:30 pm from the DR site.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies reached an all-time peak of Rs 4,12,36,791.05 crore in the special trading session.

Among the Sensex components, Nestle, Power Grid, Tata Motors, Tata Consultancy Services, HCL Technologies, Hindustan Unilever and State Bank of India were the major gainers.

JSW Steel, Mahindra & Mahindra, Maruti and Kotak Mahindra Bank were among the laggards. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

INDIAN DELEGATION HOLDS TALKS WITH KEY ENTITIES IN UAE

DUBAI, 18 MAY

An inter-ministerial Indian delegation on the framework agreement on the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC) has visited the UAE for the first time to hold discussions with the key entities there on cooperation for the empowerment and operation of the strategically vital project.

The visit, which took place within three months of signing the Agreement, reflects the importance both governments attach to the IMEEC project, a press statement by the Embassy of India, Abu Dhabi said.

The Corridor will provide effective alternate supply routes generating efficiencies and reducing costs. Both sides agreed to continue discussions for early implementation of the Agreement, it said.

The Indian delegation comprised senior officials from the Ministry of Shipping, Ports & Waterways, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Central Board of Excise and Customs and Deendayal Upadhyay Port, Kandla. They visited Khalifa Port, Fujairah Port and Jebel Ali Port where they held detailed discussions with the respective Port authorities for facilitating the movement of goods between India and UAE. *—PTI*

Mumbai International Airport records 4.36M passengers in April

MUMBAI, 18 MAY

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA) experienced a 131 per cent recovery in passenger numbers, compared to April 2019 (pre-pandemic), Mumbai International Airport Limited said in a statement, adding that the airport has seen a robust growth in terms of passenger traffic during the month of April 2024.

In April 2024, CSMIA facilitated the movement of 4.36 million passengers, marking a growth of 42 per cent compared to April 2022 and 9 per cent compared to April 2023, underscoring its status as a premier global aviation hub.

The airport witnessed a total of 26,870 Air Traffic Movements (ATMs), including 19,892 domestic and 6,978 international ATMs in April 2024. This figure records a 24 per cent growth compared to April 2022 (21,597) and 5 per cent growth compared to April 2023 (25,477). The highest passenger traffic movement in a single day for the month was observed on the 14 April with 156,793 passengers travelling through CSMIA - with 1,13,540 domestic and 43,253 international movements.

The airport witnessed a total of 26,870 Air Traffic Movements **PHOTO: PTI**

In April 2024, Delhi, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad emerged as the leading domestic destinations for CSMIA, while Dubai, Singapore and Abu Dhabi maintained their position as the most favoured international destinations. Mumbai International Airport Limited (MIAL) is managed by Adani Airport Holdings Limited (AAHL), a subsidiary of Adani Group. MIAL is a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) venture. *—ANI*

OYO withdraws DRHP, to refile IPO post refinancing: Sources

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

Softbank-backed OYO is set to refile its much-awaited IPO as the global travel tech player is close to finalising its refinancing plans to raise up to USD 450 million via sale of dollar bonds, sources said.

JP Morgan is the likely lead banker for the refinancing through the sale of dollar bonds at an estimated interest rate of 9 to 10 per cent per annum, a source said.

In preparation for the refinancing, OYO has already moved its application with markets regulator SEBI to withdraw its current draft red herring prospectus (DRHP). The company intends to refile an updated version of the DRHP, after the bond issuance.

Oravel Stays Ltd, OYO's parent company, had in November prepaid a significant chunk of its debt amounting to Rs 1,620 crore through a buyback process. The buyback involved repurchasing 30 per cent of its outstanding Term Loan B of USD 660 million. The move brought down its outstanding loan amount to around USD 450 million.

A source closely involved in the company's IPO plans told PTI, "The refinancing will result in material changes to OYO's financial statements. Hence as per existing regulations, it will need to revise its filings with the regulator".

In September 2021, OYO had filed preliminary documents with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) for a Rs 8,430 crore IPO. The launching of the IPO was delayed due to the then volatile market conditions making the company prepare to settle for a lower valuation at around USD 4-6 billion instead of the USD 11 billion it was targeting initially. *—PTI*

India on mission to become world's leading producer of critical minerals: Hindustan Zinc Chairperson

PHOTO: IANS

New Delhi, 18 May

India is on a mission to become the world's leading and the most sustainable producer of critical minerals, Vedanta group firm Hindustan Zinc's Chairperson Priya Agarwal Hebbar has said. Critical minerals, such as cobalt, copper, lithium, nickel and rare earths, play a crucial role in the production of clean energy technologies, from wind turbines to electric cars. Critical minerals are particularly in demand for the production of batteries for electric cars. *—PTI*

India has one of the most liberal FDI in the world **PHOTO: PIXABAY**

FDI norms in sectors likely to be eased: DPIIT Secretary

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

India has recently relaxed foreign direct investment norms in the space sector and there is a possibility of further FDI liberalisation in certain other areas when the new government will come to power, a top official said on Saturday.

Secretary in Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) Rajesh Kumar Singh said that in the last few years, India has liberalised FDI policy in many segments.

India has one of the most liberal foreign direct investment (FDI) policies in the world and in fact more liberal than many Southeast Asian countries that the country is often compared with, he said.

Recently FDI norms were eased in the space sector and "it is quite possible that under a new government, we can attempt some further liberalisation of any pockets that are left and where some liberalisation is possible," Singh said.

The government has eased FDI norms in the space sector by allowing 100 per cent overseas investment in making components for satellites, as part of efforts to attract overseas players and private companies.

FDI in India declined 13 per cent to USD 32.03 billion in April-December 2023, dragged down by lower infusion in computer hardware and software, telecom, auto, and pharma sectors, according to the government data. *—PTI*

AMID MID-AIR BLOWOUT

Boeing boss' $33M pay package approved

UNITED STATES, 18 MAY

Boeing shareholders have signed off on the plane-maker's plan to grant outgoing boss Dave Calhoun a 2023 pay package worth nearly $33m (£25m).

A majority voted in favour of the plan, which had drawn criticism as the company grapples with a crisis sparked by the mid-air blowout of a panel on one of its planes in January.

Such pay votes, held at the company's annual meetings, are not binding.

A breakdown of the vote was not immediately available.

Ahead of the meeting, at least one prominent shareholder advisory group had criticised the plan and it also drew attention from some investors who spoke at the event.

Calhoun's compensation package included salary of $1.4m **PHOTO: BBC**

The firm's decision to keep outgoing boss Dave Calhoun on the company's board of directors had raised questions as well, but was also approved.

Calhoun's compensation package included salary of $1.4m (£1.1m) and stock awards worth about $30m (£23m) when granted.

That compared to a package of roughly $22.6m in 2022.

In a question-and answer session after the vote, the firm was asked how the compensation for Calhoun and others were "justified" given the severe challenges now facing the company.

New board chairman Steve Mollenkopf said the board had reduced some 2024 awards for executives after the accident and moved swiftly to overhaul the design of its pay incentives.

The Alaska Airlines incident revived questions about the firm's manufacturing and safety procedures and has spawned numerous investigations and lawsuits.

Just days ago, the US Department of Justice (DOJ) said it was considering whether to prosecute Boeing over deadly crashes involving its 737 Max aircraft in 2018 and 2019, after determining it had breached a deal that shielded it from criminal charges. In March, Boeing said Calhoun would step down by the end of the year.

—BBC News

PHOTO: PTI

Hardik Pandya suspended for first match of next IPL

MUMBAI, 18 MAY

Mumbai Indians skipper Hardik Pandya has been fined Rs 30 lakh and suspended from his team's opening match of the next edition of IPL for slow over-rate offense for the third time in the competition. With Mumbai Indians' IPL 2024 campaign ending on Friday after their final league game against Lucknow Super Giants, Pandya's suspension will only come into effect during the team's opening game next season. "Hardik Pandya, the Mumbai Indians captain, has been fined after his team maintained a slow over rate during their IPL2024 match against Lucknow Super Giants at the Wankhede Stadium, Mumbai on 17 May," a media release stated.—*PTI*

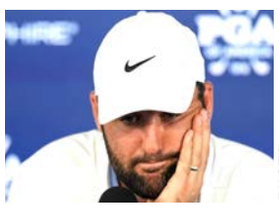


PHOTO: X/@SCHEFFLERLEGION

After starting his day in jail, Scheffler finds peace

LOUISVILLE , 18 MAY

Perspective was even harder to come by than birdies through all the raindrops, bourbon, and cigar smoke that streamed across golf's biggest stage Friday during one of the sport's most bizarre mornings ever. By the time the world's best player, Scottie Scheffler, had been booked into jail, had his mug shot taken, his police statement recorded, and his release secured, entrepreneurs near Valhalla Golf Club were already selling "Free Scottie" T-shirts outside. Fans, some of them self-proclaimed Scottie lovers, were already wearing them inside. And by the time the day had ended, with Scheffler remarkably tied for fourth place at the PGA Championship after a round that looked as efficient as any he's played of late.—*PTI*

Sunrisers aiming for second spot in IPL points table

HYDERABAD, 18 MAY

High on confidence after making their first playoffs in three years, Sunrisers Hyderabad will aim for a second-place finish in the IPL points table when they take on Punjab Kings in their final league game here on Sunday. Sunrisers Hyderabad, who had finished in the bottom rung in each of the last three editions of the IPL, came out all guns blazing this year to establish themselves as firm contenders for the title with their ultra-aggressive batting approach and skillful bowling. The match starts at 3:30 pm IST.—*PTI*

Sift, Niraj Kumar win in Olympic Selection Trials

ASTANA, 18 MAY

Sift Kaur Samra won her third women's 50m rifle 3 positions competition while Niraj Kumar emerged victorious in the men's event for a second time on the penultimate day of the Olympic Selection Trial (OST) 3 and 4 in Bhopal on Saturday. Sift shot 461.3 in the women's 3P trial 4 final to edge out Nischal by a point. Ashi Chouksey was third with 448.1. Shriyanka Sadangi and Anjum Moudgil were fourth and fifth respectively in the five-woman field. In the men's 3P, Niraj finished on top with a healthy 462.9, a whole 1.7 ahead of second-placed Chain Singh.—*PTI*

RR aims to snap the losing streak and secure No. 2 spot

KKR on the other hand, has a tabletop position with 19 points

GUWAHATI, 18 MAY

Rajasthan Royals will be desperate to snap their four-match losing streak and finish in the top two when they meet table-toppers Kolkata Knight Riders in an important IPL game here on Sunday.

Having secured the playoff berth with 16 points, the Royals have started floundering at the business end of the tournament losing four matches on the trot. Their batting flair has eluded them as they have not managed to cross the 150 mark in their last two matches, and with their star England opener Jos Buttler returning home for national duty, the Royals have big shoes to fill. Their top three batters Yashasvi Jaiswal, skipper Sanju Samson, and local hero Riyan Parag will have to shoulder additional responsibilities if they are to snap the losing streak and head to the playoffs finishing in the top two, which will give them two cracks to reach the final. KKR (19 points), on the other hand, have already assured themselves a tabletop position after a washout against Gujarat Titans in Ahmedabad in the previous round handed them one point.

KKR skipper Iyer and RR captain Sanju Samson *PHOTO: X / @IPL*

They will be high on confidence but at the same time, they may have to guard against complacency.

Since their win in the return leg clash against Mumbai Indians at Eden Gardens on 11 May, KKR have not played any match with the washout in Ahmedabad.

Traveling to Ahmedabad and then back home in Kolkata for a day's practice and again heading to Guwahati for the final league clash could be quite frustrating and break their rhythm of a four-match winning streak. —*PTI*

Impact Player rule has disrupted the balance of the game: Kohli

GUWAHATI, 18 MAY

Echoing India skipper Rohit Sharma's sentiments, star batter Virat Kohli has criticized the Impact Player substitution rule and said it is "disrupting the balance" of the game. The mid-innings substitution rule, adopted in the previous edition of the IPL, has sparked a row with Rohit expressing his displeasure in a podcast last month. Now, Kohli has urged for a rethink of the rule. "I agree with Rohit. Entertainment is one aspect of the game but there is no balance," Kohli said on Jio Cinema. "I think it has disrupted the balance and a lot of people are feeling this way, not just me," he said. Rohit in the podcast had said, "I'm not a big fan... It's going to hold back all-rounders. Cricket is played by 11, not 12 (players)." Punjab Kings set the record for the highest successful chase in T20 history when they overhauled Kolkata Knight Riders' 262 with eight balls to spare. Sunrisers Hyderabad also smashed the record for the highest-ever total in franchise cricket by posting 287/3 against Royal Challengers Bengaluru. This edition has witnessed eight 250-plus totals and Kohli felt the bowlers' pain. —*PTI*

Virat Kohli *PHOTO: X / @IPL*

ITALIAN OPEN FINAL

It's Zverev's forehand vs Jarry's topspin

ROME, 18 MAY

The fifth-ranked Zverev kept patient, though, and took his chance when it came as he rallied to beat his unheralded Chilean opponent 1-6, 7-6 (4), 6-2 on Friday for a spot in the Italian Open final.

"I was just hanging on the second set. I brought my energy up," Zverev said. "He hit me off the court in the first set and I didn't play well at all, but he was a big reason why. He gave me no rhythm."

In Sunday's final, Zverev will face another Chilean, Nicolas Jarry, who beat Tommy Paul 6-3, 6-7 (3), 6-3 on the American's 27th birthday.

The 24th-ranked Jarry came back from a set down to eliminate Stefanos Tsitsipas in the quarterfinals and will be playing his first Masters Series final.

Jarry required five match points to finish off Paul and ended up with 33 winners to his Paul's 20, but also many more unforced errors — 49 to 15 — in a match that lasted nearly three hours.

"I go for it. And, if everything goes in, amazing," Jarry said. "But it's difficult to maintain."

Zverev, the 2017 Rome champion, had the pinkie on his left hand bandaged following a fall in his previous match, after which he said his finger was "crooked." The German plays right-handed but uses a two-handed backhand.

Nicolas Jarry and Alexander Zverev *PHOTO: TENNIS-X.COM*

He said his pinkie was swollen and he was using painkillers.

"I tore a capsule. ... But I didn't break any bones," Zverev said. "The finger is still very, very big. It was manageable."

It's Zverev's third final in Rome. He won in 2017 by beating Novak Djokovic in straight sets for his first Masters Series title. He lost to Rafael Nadal in the title match a year later.

"I've been here before," Zverev said. "I know what it takes and hopefully I can use that."

Final will play on Sunday 19 May. —*AP*

Satwik-Chirag pair enters Thailand Open final

BANGKOK, 17 MAY

India's premier men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty entered the final of the Thailand Open badminton tournament with an easy straight-game victory over Lu Ming-Che and Tang Kai-Wei of Chinese Taipei here on Saturday.

Asian Games gold medallist pair Satwik and Chirag needed just 35 minutes to beat their world No. 80 opponents 21-11 21-12 in the semifinal match of the Super 500 tournament at the Nimibutr Stadium here.

Satwik and Chirag have a deep relationship with Thailand as it was here five years back in 2019 that they won their maiden Super 500 crown. On Saturday, the Indian pair inched closer to regaining the title after reaching the summit clash again.

The Indian pair thus continued to make waves in the BWF World Tour after progressing to their fourth final of the season. The duo had finished runner-up at the Malaysia Super 1000 and India Super 750 before claiming the French Super 750 in March.

Satwiksairaj Rankireddy (right) and Chirag Shetty *PHOTO: X/@SATWIKSAIRAJ*

In the final on Sunday, the world number three Indian duo, the top seeds in this tournament, will be up against the Chinese pair of Chen Bo Yang and Liu Yi, who defeated Kim Gi Jung and Kim Sa Rang of South Korea 21-19 21-18 in the other semifinal on Saturday.

Satwik and Chirag had some low returns in the last couple of tournaments. The Indian pair lost in the second round at the All England Championships and then missed the Asia Championships due to an injury to Satwik. —*PTI*

Nikhat Zareen win Elorda Cup 2024 *PHOTO: X/ © BFI*

Elorda Cup: Nikhat, Minakshi secure gold in boxing

ASTANA, 18 MAY

Two-time World Champion Nikhat Zareen clinched the Elorda Cup as she defeated Zhazira Urakbayeva of Kazakhstan 5:0 by unanimous decision in the Women's 52 kg category.

Besides Nikhat, Minakshi (48kg), Anamika (50kg), and Manisha (60kg) also made their way into the finals comfortably. Minakshi and Manisha put up similar dominating displays in their semi-finals to grab a 5-0 unanimous victory against Kazakh boxers Gulnaz Buribayeva and Tangatar Assem respectively.

Anamika, on the other hand, was adjudged victorious after her opponent Kazakhstan's Gulnar Turapbay was disqualified for excessive holding after three warnings. Meanwhile, Sonu (63kg) and Manju Bamboriya (66kg) ended their campaigns with bronze medals after suffering contrasting defeats in their last clashes. Sonu fought valiantly against Uzbekistan's Zieda Yarasheva but ended up on a losing side with a 2-3 scoreline whereas Manju Bamboriya faced a tough 0-5 loss against China's Liu Yang. —*PTI*

SWIATEK STORMS PAST SABALENKA TO WIN THIRD ROME TITLE

ROME, 18 MAY

In the latest clash between the World No.1 and No.2 players, top-seeded Iga Swiatek defeated Aryna Sabalenka 6-2, 6-3 on Saturday to win the Internazionali BNL d'Italia title.

Swiatek needed 1 hour and 29 minutes to beat Sabalenka for the eighth time in their 11 meetings. Swiatek has triumphed in Rome in three of the last four years, also taking the WTA 1000 title in 2021 and 2022. Swiatek's run to her 21st career WTA singles title, and her fourth of this year. —*AP*

Swiatek *PHOTO:TENNIS-X.COM*

XAVI DENIES THAT BARCELONA'S LEADERSHIP IS CONSIDERING FIRING HIM

HAMIRPUR, 12 MAY

Xavi Hernandez on Saturday denied reports in Spanish media outlets that Barcelona's leadership is considering firing the coach for having said that the club's poor finances will impede it from competing with Real Madrid.

"The club has transmitted to me that I should stay calm and continue working with the same motivation and commitment. Nothing has changed," Xavi said at a pregame news conference.

Almost all the questions he faced were about the speculation in Spain's sports press that club president Joan Laporta was upset with Xavi for having said earlier this week that "the situation is very difficult, above all on the economic level, for us to compete with our top rivals, whether it be Real Madrid or teams in Europe."

The media reports said Laporta is pondering a replacement for Xavi this summer.

Xavi insisted Saturday that he had heard no such thing from the club. "I don't know and I don't care where that information is coming from. I have the support of the president and Deco, our sports director," the former Barcelona midfielder said.

PHOTO: X / XAVI HERNÁNDEZ

Neither Laporta nor the club have made any public statements about the rumors. The club said it had no comment on them when asked by The Associated Press.

Even if Barcelona keeps Xavi on, it is still an awkward situation for a coach who just three weeks prior had reversed a previous decision made in January to leave the club this summer. In April, Xavi said that he had changed his mind after his players showed him that they believed in the team's potential and had improved their performances.

Laporta inherited a club mired in debts of more than 1.3 billion ($1.4 billion), and football's most expensive payroll, when he returned to run the club for a second time in 2021. —*APW*

Pranavi, Diksha, and Tvesa cut at German Masters

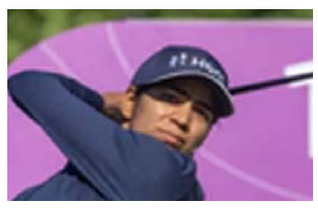
ASTANA, 18 MAY

Pranavi Urs, Diksha Dagar, and Tvesa Malik were the only ones to make the 36-hole cut at the Amundi German Masters.

Pranavi and Diksha carded 1-over 73 each and were 3-over for two rounds and placed T-30, while Tvesa (77) squeezed inside the cut line at 5-over.

Of the four others, Sneha Singh (75) missed the cut by a shot, Vani Kapoor (77) by three shots and Amandeep Drall (78) by five shots.

Avani Prashanth withdrew midway through the second round. The cut fell at +5, with 66 players making it through to the weekend. —*PTI*



Pranavi Urs *PHOTO: PTI*

T20 WORLD CUP

Most of Indian players to leave for New York on 25 May

PHOTO: X / @T20WORLDCUP

MUMBAI, 18 MAY

The majority of the Indian players along with the jumbo support staff will be flying out to New York in 25 May, with the rest leaving for the T20 World Cup only after the May 26 IPL final.

Earlier, the members of teams failing to qualify for the play-offs were supposed to leave for New York on 21 May, two days after the final league game of the IPL on 19 May but it has since been learned that there has been some change in plans and now the first batch will leave on 25 May.

"The likes of skipper Rohit Sharma, Hardik Pandya, Suryakumar Yadav, Jasprit Bumrah, Rishabh Pant, Arshdeep Singh, Axar Patel are some of the players along with support staff who are expected to leave on 25 May," a BCCI source told PTI on the condition of anonymity.

"Earlier, the departure date for the first batch was 21 May but since India is playing only one warm-up game (vs Bangladesh on 1 June), the players will get to spend some extra days at home," the source added.

Only those players who are part of the IPL final will stay back and will leave for New York on 27 May.

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This will also give adequate time to the squad to reduce jet lag and have at least three to four quality net sessions before the Bangladesh warm-up game.

India will open their campaign against Ireland on 5 June in New York, followed by the marquee clash against Pakistan on 9 June.

India squad: Rohit Sharma (Captain), Hardik Pandya (Vice Captain), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Suryakumar Yadav, Rishabh Pant (WK), Sanju Samson (WK), Shivam Dube, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Arshdeep Singh, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohd. Siraj. —*PTI*